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2000AD ReGened

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Welcome to the **Award Winning ComicScene Issue 4**. Thanks to everyone who voted for us in the Yancy St Awards for Best Specialist Publication at Edinburgh ComicCon. Our fellow nominees were Starburst and Full Bleed, so we were against good company and feel fortunate and honoured to have won. In this issue we have an exclusive from the team known for their work on Transformers and Death's Head Simon Furman and Geoff Senior. Their new ten part comic is available from www.getmycomics.com, where you can also order your copy of ComicScene. The prelude to this series was featured in our Great Big ComicScene Annual 2019, which you can read as part of our Ultimate Digital Package.
Order that at www.getmycomics.com/comicscene.

Lots of fun and frolics to be had in this issue from the Treasury of British Comics, 2000AD plus a comparison of MACH 1 and the Six Million Dollar Man. Corker strip action incudes Whackoman! and Our Land Part 3 plus a look at new anthologies Brawler from Steve Tanner and Space Warp from Pat Mills. Add a sparkle of Invincible football action, Batman in the 1960's, X Men Dark Phoenix and the Omens look Good! Don't worry, you will get that little reference by the end of this 80 page romp!

Next month it's the first of our Summer Specials with added comic strip action from Captain Cosmic and Lady Flintlock. Make sure you get your subscription in now!

Yours aye, Tony.

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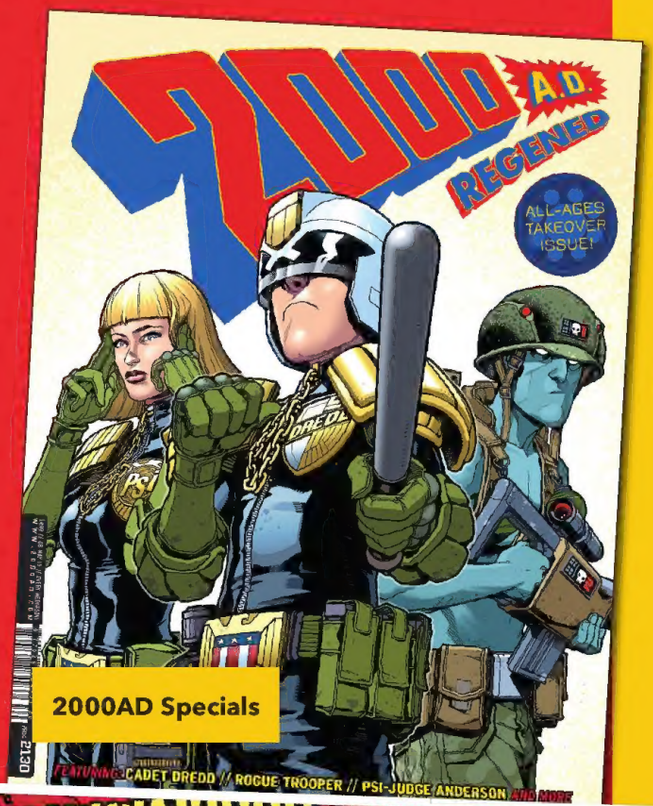

2000AD Specials

ComicScene UK Volume 2 Issue 4 July 2019. Copyright 2019 by ComicsFlix.org Publishing

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LET'S TALK FIGURES, SALES FIGURES THAT IS!

Back in February, the Audit Bureau of Circulations released the latest data on magazine sales data in the UK, which included figures for some comics and young children's magazines for the second half of 2018. As usual, they made for interesting reading, although unfortunately, we don't get the whole picture on the state of our industry, because not every comic title is registered.

What we do know from these latest figures is that for some, long term investment in a publication and a great team of creators – both editorial and freelancers – is being rewarded by strong sales. Yes, I'm talking about the good news for DC Thomson's humour Beano, which at an average weekly sale of over 41,000 a week, gives it an annual sale of over two million.

Think about that for a minute. Yes, that average sale is about half of what The Beano was selling in 2006 (just shy of 75,000 copies a week), but in an era when consumer magazine sales across the board have nose-dived, that headline figure is impressive. In the Top 500 US comic sales chart, for comparison, the top-selling humour comic in December 2018 was Rick & Morty vs Dungeons and Dragons #3, which had orders of 22,615. Titan Comics Minions: Viva le Boss had orders of just under 2,500. In fact, if you're looking at the sales figures overall, the Beano sales are almost on a par with Batman who Laughs, if it maintained its impressive 222,000 plus sales for its first issue over twelve months, which is unlikely, simply because sales after a first issue do, generally, fall in the Direct Sales market.

The Beano's recovery from declining print sales around 2013 is due to a combination of factors, not least of them the fantastic team of creators working on the strips, who include Nigel Auctherlounie, Nigel Parkinson, Laura Howell and many more, alongside the work put in by Beano Studios to grow the title as

a "brand" beyond the comic. The success of the Dennis & Gnasher Unleashed! show on CBBC isn't going to hurt, either.

But when you also see that sales for adult humour VIZ are up too, by 4.3%, with 43,647 print circulation and 4,941 digital, and yes, digital comic sales are increasingly important for some titles, then hopefully that's good news for Rebellion, which recently launched its first humour comic, the Cor! & Buster Special in April, offering all- new takes on classic characters from Buster, Whizzer & Chips, Cor! and more, from Gums and Kid Kong to Faceache and Sweeny Toddler. The sales figures haven't been revealed but with distribution to many WHSmith stores as well as comic shops, let's hope it's a success - and signals a revival of those brands on a more regular basis.

Of course, it's not all good news for our industry. While the headline sales of Beano make for good reading, the fact that titles such as 2000AD, Commando and others aren't even registered might not sound very encouraging – but I wouldn't be too worried by that. The fact of the matter is that ABC releases data for the UK media industry to use when trading print, digital and event advertising, and the days are long gone when comics attracted much advertising revenue...so why bother paying out to be registered? Many brands can't even advertise in comics, such as fast foods or sugary breakfast cereals these days.

This probably explains why so few children's and teenage titles are now ABC registered, rather than some attempt to hide sales, although of course, they are a far cry from the millions a week that comics once sold. It's sad that another title with humour content, DC Thomson's EPIC, breathed its last earlier this year, and disappointing that Egmont have taken the decision to reprint its strips from TOXIC, rather than continue to commission new material - never a good sign.

Like many ComicScene readers I'd rather see a lot more comics, with strips from cover to cover, on sale in our newsagents, rather than the cheaper, preferred format of many of today's feature-led titles. But the continued resilience of the sector while women's magazines and newspaper sales, for example, continue to fall, is encouraging. (Titles like CBeebies are on the rise, for all the uncertainty in the economy, for example, as well as Beano). There's lots to be positive about.

The success of Beano might also in part not just be down to investment by the publisher – it might also, quite simply, be down to the fact that a potential reader can actually sample most issues of the comic before they buy, because it's rarely encased in a plastic bag like a lot of its rivals. For me, the whole bagging of comics on the UK news stand, complete with plastic toy, is counter-productive, in that you turn your publication into a product, dependent on brand recognition or how "good" the 'free' gift on offer is. So I'm very encouraged when I see some publisher eschew the whole practice – not just Beano, but the Phoenix, and the new Munch Cats!, too – and Rebellion. With increasing concerns about plastic pollution and the whole Say No To Plastic campaign, I hope it won't be long before other publishers follow suit.

It might even bring the price of comics down, which of course is another sales factor – and the strongest one yet when it comes to casual purchase!

- *The Audit Bureau of Circulations is the industry body for media measurement, helping empower a British industry worth some £22 billion. Web: www.abc.org.uk*

- *View the downthetubes spreadsheet of ABC figures here: http://bit.ly/DTT-UK-Comic-Sales*

The Demise of Marvel UK

In this column for ComicScene #1, I erroneously perpetuated the much-repeated claim that Marvel UK was purchased by Panini UK in the mid 1990s. This is not the case and I'm happy to put proceedings straight thanks to author Rob Kirby, who's working on a history of the company.

In 1995, Marvel US bought Figurine Panini, along with a number of other businesses, merging Panini's UK offices with that of Marvel UK, and bringing in the Panini UK management to take over from Editorial Director Paul Neary. Contrary to what has often been previously written elsewhere, although Marvel US took more of a backseat thereafter, they still owned Marvel UK and would continue to do so until the business difficulties that saw Marvel US enter the Chapter 11 process in America were resolved. As part of the eventual settlement, they were forced to divest themselves of various acquisitions, including Panini.

It was only at the end of 1999 that Marvel UK became part of Panini UK and was no longer part of the Marvel group. This change was immediately reflected within the copyright indicia inside all of the first UK titles to bear a January 2000 date, and can most clearly been seen on the cover of Doctor Who Magazine, where the classic Marvel Comics logo from that period suddenly disappeared after the publication of #285, cover dated 15th December 2000.

NUTS & BOLTS RAVINGS FROM INSIDE THE COMICS PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

Author: John Freeman | **Twitter:** @johnfreeman_dtt | **Website:** downthetubes.net
John is currently writing Crucible

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SHANE CHEBSEY INTERVIEW

Author: Leonard Sultana | **Twitter:** @TheConCollectve

Shane Chebsey is one of the most recognised figures in the UK comic convention scene, being the man behind numerous comics-centric events over the past decade and a half, shows which have brought creative talent from across the globe to his shows. In more recent years, Shane has been behind the popular and successful ICE International Comic Expo events across the country, spearheaded by the flagship annual event in Birmingham, and he is also now part of the team behind Comics-Salopia in Shrewsbury which has its inaugural show this June. For more on ICE, head to https://internationlcomicexpo.wordpress.com/ and find out more about Comics-Salopia at https://comicssalopia.com/

You've been doing this a while now, with varying degrees of success - what do you feel is the hallmark of a successful and popular comic convention, here in the UK?

I guess it depends what you care about as an organiser. Not losing money is good! For me, personally, it's knowing that everyone who attended had a good time - we've only ever have five complaints in twelve years, so for me that's a big success. Critical success matter as it means you can build your fanbase organically and, if you get good feedback from the fans, it shows your doing something right.

Attendee feedback and interaction is the most important element of a comic convention, I feel - what have been the most frequent responses you've been getting back from your attendees? What have you been hearing on the grapevine?

Obviously you can't please all of the people all of the time. There will always be someone who didn't get the sketch they wanted or who didn't find the back issue they were after.

These sort of things are beyond my control. I concentrate on the things that I can control.

We change venues in response to visitors and exhibitors comments for example. Things like parking and loading are very important to many people so we've responded to that feedback as it's been the main gripe about previous venues.

I've been to a number of conventions in recent years where the idea of a comic con simply hasn't stuck, simply due to where it's been held. Can a convention rise and fall by the simple fact of being held in certain areas of the country? Is it all 'location, location, location'?

Yes I think we're your event is happening has a huge impact on attendance. You can research a location, but sometimes the only way to find out is to put on a show there: advertise the hell out of it and see what happens.

Sometimes there's just not enough local internet or fans to support an event as we found out with ICE Margate - lesson learned. We put on a great show there as you know with top guests, but simply not many comics fans locally. Most of the people who came travelled from miles away, not many locals. And we spent twice as much on advertising as we do for our other shows.

If an area is socially deprived or without much arts culture, that can also have an impact.

The bigger the convention landscape gets, the more the need for slicker presentations, more prestige venues, more content, more panels, more international guests, more more more... How demanding have the convention going audience become in recent years? And how difficult does that make it for you to deliver?

The expectations from fans get bigger and bigger - there is incredible competition now compared to when I started twelve years ago - also the expectations from many creators are higher. Some now charge appearance fees on top of expenses.

The big media shows are putting the stranglehold on the Comic Conventions as we can't pay the huge appearance fees some artists and writers now expect due to the big shows.

International Comics Expo

Small non profit independent shows that are all about comics are struggling without a doubt. For me it is about always offering something different that the big shows simply can't offer. More intimate settings, more time talking to guests one on one and higher quality panels and talks.

We deliver all of that. It's a friendly atmosphere at ICE with no massive queues, no stupidly high signing fees and obviously a much stronger focus on comics. Our fans love their comics - and we love our fans.

Prices for certain guests and their appearances have appeared to skyrocket in recent years, also. Where can the blame for this be laid, do you think - organisers, feeling they have to make the most of the boom before it all goes tits up; special guests, sensing pound signs in the air and making hay while the sun shines; or simply the demand for content based around international properties? It's easier - and cheaper - for a UK convention to book a Bryan Talbot rather than a Brian Michael Bendis, for example...!

I think a combination of factors have caused the recent hike in signing charges and appearance fees. Comic creators have seen actors getting stupid money for appearing at shows. In my opinion, far more than they should be getting in many cases, and the creators want a piece of that action.

And why not? Who can blame them? As long as there is supply and demand it will continue.

Unfortunately it means many comic creators have now priced themselves out of comic conventions and meeting your hero at a convention is quickly becoming an experience only for the very wealthy. That makes me sad. However, there are still lots of creators who love a proper comic conventions and will continue to support them and continue to give back to the fans who support their work. God bless those guys!

What do you think the takeaway theme of 2019 conventions is going to be? More last-minute cancellations or a tougher stance by the organisers? Back to basics or even bigger things to come?

I think 2019 will be a year of change. Yes, as in 2018, I think we'll see more events go bust but I also think we'll see the more innovative organisers changing their business models and re examining how they can make a comics event financially sustainable. I think what will happen is that only the very best events will survive as fans become more picky about with shows they will attend.

It's not just about the big name guests anymore: it's about the whole Convention experience. There had to be something for everyone at a good convention and it needs to be stress free for fans, exhibitors and guests alike and we'll keep working towards making ICE the best experience possible for everyone within what our budget will allow. Hopefully, the fans and the creators will keep coming along and supporting what we are doing and we'll keep delivery great events.

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2000AD SPECIALS

'Rogue Trooper always went up a notch when they were in the strip'

Earthlets are real danger of suffering Thrill-Power overload with no less than three 2000AD Specials due for release this month. First up is the bargain-priced, US-format sized Villians Takeover Special, which hits the shelves to coincide this year's Free Comic Book Day before Prog #2130's extra - sized all - ages extravaganza – a follow up to last year's Free Comic Book Day Regened special...and finally this year's 2000AD Sci-Fi Special – dedicated to the late great Carlos Ezquerra - arrives in early June.

"Regened was a continuation of last year's FCBD issue, which was an attempt to find a younger audience," explains 2000AD editor Matt Smith. "But because of the number of specials that we're putting out across 2019, it was decided to make it part of the regular run of progs. The Sci-Fi Special then became a tribute to Carlos by sad necessity, as it includes the last project Carlos was working on, namely his and John Wagner's Spector."

"When I first came up with the idea for the first Regened a couple of years ago, I wanted to return 2000AD to its roots as a comic specifically for younger readers to see if it could still work," adds Treasury of Britain editor Keith Richardson, who this year is in charge of the Villains Takeover. "FCBD seemed like the ideal event for the title as it attracts and embraces a younger readership. Matt is editing the new Regened issue and it looks great. With the Villains Takeover, we have done a complete 180, as this is for the fans who were so gracious and positive about the first Regened offering."

According to Richardson, it was an easy decision to focus on the Galaxy's Greatest Comic's most infamous bad guys. "Everyone loves a good villain and we have plenty!" he laughs. "2000AD doesn't have many heroes anyway, as they're all kind of villains – Dredd included!"

When it came to assembling the Villains Takeover's nefarious line-up, the Dark Judge himself must surely have been a shoo-in? "There are a significant number of fans around the world who will rabidly buy anything Judge Death-related," says Richardson, who admits that Rob Williams and Henrik Sahlstrom's 'The Judge Who Laughs' could be their wry response to DC's The Batman Who Laughs. "Rob Williams who wrote the story is a very canny lad, so it probably is."

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"Keith asked if I'd be up for a short Judge Death tale, and as I'd never written him before, I thought it would be fun," adds Williams. "Putting Judge Death in for a spot of psychotherapy. Good luck, that doctor! As for the title, it might be a gentle coincidence, and it's not as if The Batman Who Laughs shows any similarity to Judge Death, eh?'

With Richardson noting "Slough Feg has long been a favourite of mine and you can tell how much fun Pat has writing him," Slaine's sinister adversary Lord Weird Slough Feg is spotlighted in 'The Lord of the Hunt' by Mills and US artist Kyle Hotz, while Nu-Earth bodylooters Brass and Bland appear in Karl Stock and Kael Ngu's 'The Professionals.' "I've always thought that Brass and Bland were underrated," claims Richardson. "Rogue Trooper always went up a notch when they were in the strip, so it's a shame they went so early on."

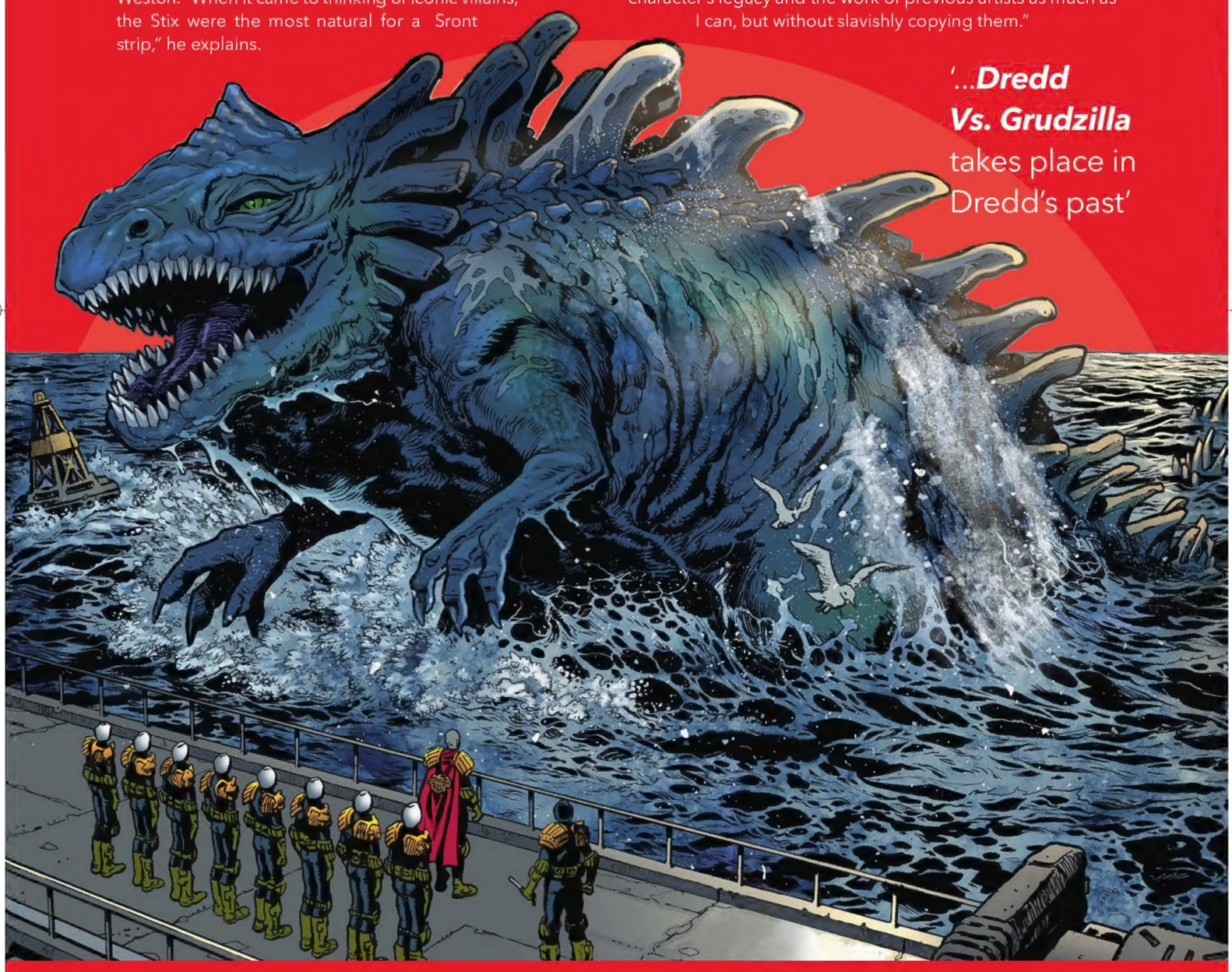
Smith also has a hand in the Villains Takeover, scripting Strontium Dog spin-off Stix 'Sleeping Dogs Lie' for artist Chris Weston. "When it came to thinking of iconic villains, the Stix were the most natural for a Sront strip," he explains.

"They've been a recurring part of the series for its lifetime, and they're good baddies to focus on, as they're ruthless, blackly comic and implacable."

"Tharg asked me to do it out of the blue, and it was the call I'd been waiting for all my working life, as I'd been desperate to draw Johnny Alpha and chums," continues Weston, who saw Stix as his opportunity to pay his respects to Carlos Ezquerra.

"It was like being in a comic strip version of that old TV show Stars in Their Eyes, which is one for the older readers out there and it was a bit like 'Tonight, Matthew, I'm going to be Carlos Ezquerra!'" he laughs. "I've done that before when I've drawn other people's characters such as when I drew Enemy Ace for DC, I looked at a lot of Joe Kubert's work on the strip to absorb some of his spirit into my artwork. I want to preserve a certain amount of visual continuity with previous stories. There's an argument for coming at it with a totally different take, which I respect but I'm not that guy. I want to pay tribute to the character's legacy and the work of previous artists as much as I can, but without slavishly copying them."

'...***Dredd Vs. Grudzilla*** takes place in Dredd's past'



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Weston has also contributed to this year's Regened special, both writing and drawing Cadet Dredd strip 'Dredd Vs. Grudzilla.' "That was a story that popped into my head after I saw the recent US remake of Godzilla," he explains. "It's fair to say that I wasn't impressed and I wanted to lampoon it somehow, and soon the idea expanded into a satire on the entire monster movie genre. The story begins when Grudzilla arrives in Mega-City One to film the latest installment of his own movie franchise. Grudzilla himself isn't the product of clever visual effects, he 's actually a genetically-mutated enlarged lizard with the brain of Hondo-Cit's most dedicated 'method actor' transplanted into him!"

At Smith's suggestion, 'Dredd Vs. Grudzilla' takes place in Dredd's past when he was still a cadet, which allowed Weston to incorporate Joe's corrupt clone brother Rico into the narrative. "He provides a good counterpoint to Dredd's voice, as you can make Rico slightly more anti-authoritarian compared to Joe, which makes sense considering the criminal path he will take later in his career," reasons Weston. "Rico's attitude problem also becomes the catalyst for the story when he casually insults Grudzilla's acting ability, provoking the monster-sized diva to fly into a devastating rampage of destruction. It's all done in the worst possible taste, and I hope the conclusion will result in every reader feeling the urge to take a long shower!"

While Cavan Scott and Nick Roche taking on Rogue Trooper, Alec Worley and Babs Tarr tackling Judge Anderson, brand new territory is explored in Alex De Campi and Eduardo Ocana's Full Tilt Boogie and Leah Moore, John Reppion and Davide Tinto's Finder & Keeper, while Karl Stock and Brett Parsons collaborate on Future Shock 'That Weird Kid.' "We wanted the stories to be complete entities so you could jump in with minimum background knowledge," says Smith, who hopes that there will be more Regened in the future. "I can't see it becoming a regular companion title, as it would cost too much to launch, but it's a project we'll return to at least annually, if successful."

With Carlos Ezquerra sadly having died last October, this year's Sci-Fi Special is themed around the legendary Spanish artist's impressive contribution to the Galaxy's Greatest Comic. Along with celebrating the iconic characters that he co-created for the Prog alone over the past four decades, it also showcases Spector, which was Ezquerra's new creator-owned series with John Wagner. "Spector's a robot cop that's been programmed to root out corruption in a near-future city," explains Smith. "He talks and thinks like a Dashiell Hammett detective, but he's difficult to fool and get results, which is why a lot of people want to see him gone."

Originally intended for the pages of the Judge Dredd Megazine, Wagner opted to cease work on Spector after Ezquerra's passing. "John had written the first four episodes, and Carlos had drawn the first two," says Smith. "We thought we could publish them in the Sci-Fi Special as fans would be interested in seeing Carlos's last work. I think a lot of readers will like to see it, incomplete or not, as it's the final project from the powerhouse creative duo of Wagner and Ezquerra"

With the remainder of the Sci-Fi Special focusing on characters that are closely associated with Ezquerra, Smith was keen to bring in writers and artists who had either previously collaborated with him, or who were deeply inspired by his imperious oeuvre. "I asked Alan Grant and Robin Smith to do Judge Dredd, as they worked a lot with Carlos a lot in the past," says Smith of 'A Night at the Museum,' which takes place in a very

unique location. "Then when it came to Fiends of the Eastern Front and Wulf, I went with creators who suited the subject matter but, of course, they've all been influenced by Carlos's work."

Indeed Michael Carroll – who pens the suitably sombre-titled 'Valhalla' for artist Patrick Goddard – counts Ezquerra among his all-time favourite comic book creators. "Carlos Ezquerra was one of the first British comic artists whose work I actively sought out," he recalls. "Aside from his incredible accomplishments on Judge Dredd and Strontium Dog, his art on 2000 AD's adaptation of Harry Harrison's Stainless Steel Rate stories absolutely blew me away, and my most prized possession is an original double-page spread from The Stainless Steel Rat.

Consequently, Carroll didn't hesitate when Smith asked him to write a story about Wulf, the Viking-turned-SD agent, who became Johnny Alpha's partner and close friend. "I jumped at the chance as Wulf has always been one of my favourite characters, and I even named one of my cats after him!" laughs Carroll. "Thirty-three years after it was published, the final chapter of 'The Ragnarok Job' still gives me the chills. Carlos was an absolute master at creating credible, solid characters, and Wulf was amongst the very best. He was kind and heroic and funny and absolutely fearless. He humanised Johnny Alpha and gave the readers a window in Johnny's world. He was a wonderful character, brought to life by an incredible artist, and I've been lucky enough to see Patrick Goddard's art for 'Valhalla' and it's wonderful stuff. He's managed to perfectly capture Wulf's essence without mimicking Carlos's style, and I think the master would have approved!"

A previously untold tale of the mysterious Romanian vampire soldiers, Guy Adams and Dave Kendall team up on 'Strange Meeting.' "I was over the moon to be asked to write a few drops of Captain Constanza's bloody biography," says Adams. "I was determined from the off that it should tie in very closely to the original 1980 series, although it also forms part of the continuity for Ian Edginton's recent exhumation of Fiends of the Eastern Front. I love the beautiful, tightly closing trap of Gerry Finley Day's script and the sumptuous, inky depths of Carlos's art with those night skies, the crumbling, cracked skin of the undead, and the iconic shadows of the undead on the battlefield. It was shocking then and remains so now, and what an achievement that was."

"I remember walking down my local high street as a twelve/ thirteen-year-old looking at the cover of the screaming soldier about to be snacked upon by Captain Constanta and his crew," adds Kendall, referring to Prog #158. "It was a genuine honour and surprise to be asked to do this one-off story, and even more so because it's a direct prequel to the original Fiends, as I was revisiting the Captain Constanta that haunted my childhood. Guy's script was darkly intimate, and there was a lot of opportunity to rely on atmosphere and creep factor. It's a real cat and mouse story, and I hope I've stayed true to Carlos's vision."

Author: Stephen Jewell | Twitter: @stephenjewell | Stephen writes for SFX, Total Film & the Megazine

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DEATH Becomes Him

To celebrate the release of the 2000AD Villains Special Chris Hallam takes a look at the biggest villains of them all...
The Dark Judges!

Of all the many adversaries Judge Dredd has faced during his years policing Mega City One, none has proven as memorable, persistent or as terrifying as the malevolent super-fiend, Judge Death. Death first stalked the streets of the city back in 1980 (that is, 2102 in Dredd's world), making an immediate impact on both 2000AD readers and Mega-citizens alike.

"My name iss Death. I have come to judge you," he said to his victims, effortlessly clawing his way through victims' bodies like they were "custard".

"You cannot kill what does not live!" he continued with flawless logic, as he resisted the Judges attempts to shoot him. "I have come to bring law to this city! My law - the law of Death!"

"My Grud, Dredd, what kind of monster is this?" exclaimed one alarmed judge as the terrifying figure proceeded to burn someone to death before apparently turning into a transparent ghost and escaping. What kind of monster indeed?

A monster calls

We soon learn Judge Death has crossed over from another dimension, where life itself is judged a crime. His initial reign of terror is short-lived, however, ending after three episodes, a final caption reading: "The menace of Judge Death would never again be let loose upon the Mega-City."

In fact, this was just the beginning. The notion of creating an antithesis to Judge Dredd (who had started his own adventures in 1977) had arisen from a conversation between Dredd writers John Wagner and Alan Grant during a stay in an Essex farmhouse. What really brought the concept to life, so to speak, however, were the inspired visuals by artist Brian Bolland.

Although it's not obvious, Bolland credits another 2000AD artist's work as crucial in inspiring the villain's unique appearance. "I think Judge Death's got a very strong Kevin O'Neill influence," he says of the Nemesis the Warlock artist. "It's not the sort of look that would have popped automatically out of my head." Producing the art for the first story (which was scripted by Wagner using the pen name, John Howard) was a very slow process. Bolland took months to produce 15 pages. But the results were definitely worth it.

"When the pages came in they would be marvelled at – the whole office would come to a standstill," recalled then 2000AD editor Steve MacManus. "When you could see the script and art come together, it became evident how well Brian told the story. He always put the story first, but also managed to get some great pictures in there."

Bolland returned to produce Judge Death Lives with Wagner and Grant in 1981, this time creating three new allies for the villain, the Dark Judges: Fear, Fire and Mortis. Bolland's work was as slow but satisfying as before, using a sheep's skull he had found in the Lake District as the basis for Mortis. Fear's terrifying features were largely concealed meanwhile, while Fire was merely a fiery outline which was quicker to draw. The story was a big success. Sadly, however, Brian Bolland subsequently left 2000AD becoming one of many British talents to take more lucrative work across the Atlantic.

Death and the maiden

One major feature of the early Judge Death stories was the introduction of Judge Cassandra Anderson: the first story had, for example, ended with Death being trapped inside the PSI Judge's head. A lively, more attractive figure than "Old Stoneyface" Dredd (Bolland had modelled her on Blondie musician, Debbie Harry), in 1985, the psychic judge finally got her own strip, Anderson Psi-Division. The first story drawn by the late Brett Ewins and Cliff Robertson was one of a number of Anderson strips to feature Judge Death and the Dark Judges again wreaking carnage on Mega City One. "The crime isss life! The sentence isss death!" Indeed.

1990, however, saw Judge Death, the Dark Judges and the new Sisters of Death wreaking a truly apocalyptic onslaught on the populace of Mega City One in Necropolis ("Thoossse about to die, we sssalute you!"). Death has enjoyed all manner of adventures since, notably appearing in the first celebrated Judge Dredd and Batman crossover graphic novel, Judgement on Gotham, produced by John Wagner, Alan Grant and Simon Bisley in 1991. In a sign of the times, Bisley admits to modelling his Judge Anderson less on Debbie Harry, more on Tori Amos, continuing the noble tradition of artists modelling the Psi division judge on whoever they happened to fancy that week.

Whoops! Necropolis

At the same time, Judge Death provided one of the star attractions in the newly launched Judge Dredd The Megazine. Young Death related the story of Judge Death from the very start as told by the villain himself to interviewer Brian Skuter ("An origins. Wow," as the luckless Skuter notes). Inside, we learned much: that Death's given name was Sidney, that his father worked as a particularly sadistic dentist and Death himself was endlessly cruel to his childhood dog "Woofie". Although very entertaining, the story (which was illustrated by Peter Doherty) did rather shatter Judge Death's aura of menace. Wagner and other writers have worked hard at correcting the impact of Young Death's humorous content ever since. Subsequent stories have seen him destroying Las Vegas and sending Judge Anderson into a coma.

Life after Death?

What does the future hold for Judge Death? Next year marks the 40th anniversary of a character, whose future, in theory, should be pretty bright. Unlike most of Dredd's foes who are, after all, usually dispatched within one story, Judge Death can return after being defeated again and again and again. His long-term prospects, indeed, are probably better than those of mere mortals like, say, Cass Anderson and Joe Dredd.

In truth, Judge Death probably needs Judge Dredd just as much as Dredd needs him. Death is a distorted mirror image of Dredd, his perverted philosophy (essentially, as all crime is committed by the living, life itself should be a crime) essentially just a more extreme version of Dredd's own ("Justice has a price. The price is freedom"). Woody Allen has observed, that the whole of humanity has been sentenced to death for a crime it didn't commit. Judge Death just takes things a stage further. At any rate, his own future looks bright.

After all, as someone once said: you cannot kill what does not live.

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M.A.C.H.1

While Judge Dredd has long been the overwhelming favourite in the pages of the Galaxy's Greatest Comic, the Lawman of the Future didn't always enjoy such unrivalled success. For in the initial few months after 2000 AD first made its debut on the newsagents' shelves in late February 1977, it was actually M.A.C.H. 1 that topped the reader's polls. Now reprinted by Rebellion in two collections – last year's The John Probe Missions Files and the recently published Close Encounters, M.A.C.H. 1 – short for Man Activated by Compu - puncture Hyperpower - centred around John Probe, a British secret service agent who is transformed into a superhuman weapon. And M.A.C.H. 1's resemblance to popular US TV series, The Six Million Dollar Man was no mistake, John Probe didn't have cybernetic limbs grafted onto him like Steve Austin's bionic Man but had instead been subjected to an intense kind of computerised acupuncture, which preternaturally enhances his natural strength and speed.

"Many of the strips in Action, the title that preceded 2000 AD, mirrored popular films and television programmes of the time," says former 2000 AD editor Steve MacManus, who also penned several episodes of M.A.C.H. 1. "The same can be said of M.A.C.H. 1 and its similarity to The Six Million Dollar Man. However, the difference in the way John Probe gained his powers -through compu-puncture hyperpower - made M.A.C.H. 1 an original strip in its own right, even if John Probe did look remarkably like Steve Austin!"

"I asked kids what they wanted to see in comics and they told me a Six Million Dollar Man-style character," adds 2000 AD's founding editor Pat Mills, who scripted the vast majority of M.A.C.H. 1's opening episodes with MacManus, Kelvin Gosnell, John Wagner, Nick Allen, Charles Herring, Roy Preston and Robert Flynn also making contributions. "I created M.A.C.H. 1, and also wrote all the early stories when it was number one in the polls, sometimes with input from Kelvin."

Like Dredger before it in Action or Rat Pack in Battle, most of M.A.C.H. 1's early episodes were resolved in one if not sometimes two issues. "The stories were self-contained, which gave readers great value for money," says Mills. "It was necessary with competing comics, but it's a killer to write, as it's like a novella being condensed down into six pages!"

"Keeping to the weekly production schedule dictated that M.A.C.H. 1 be produced by a roster of artists and writers," adds MacManus. "Keeping it at

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"According to MacManus, it was inevitability that ***Judge Dredd*** would eventually ***supercede M.A.C.H. 1***"

one of two episodes made it easier for new readers to join the fun and the process can be seen in the early Judge stories, too."

According to MacManus, it was inevitability that Judge Dredd would eventually supercede M.A.C.H. 1. "Most of Tommy Keane's artwork after about a dozen issues of the Prog 'Dredd' was a character animated by expressionless poses, and in the comic he was very aloof. It was clear that the readers did not," says MacManus. "John Probe may have had a computer in his head, but Dredd was a gun that had no kinds of bullets, a book of laws and an awesome motorbike to boot."

Replaced as 2000 AD lottery by Gonzo! in the autumn of 1977, Mills' revival of the casual of many of the other strips of M.A.C.H. 1, who he believes didn't put the same personal investment of research that he did into their work. "The concept is that the standard of living and environment [of Mega-City One] M.A.C.H. 1 operates in" he says. "But I'm torn my story out to other writers, who generally don't get it. It's an unconscious process but I see M.A.C.H. 1 as a computer in charge of their travel systems, and as they try to find ways to escape, you think that she covers up the M.A.C.H. 1. That is because they're putting a stop on their fun and not the mainly young readers – quite true in the case of 2000 AD and the reason it's so popular. Mark Wright should have gone to the Moon, but wants being cool but always being constantly undercut by the Adjudicators like the author who gives a name to the Moon?"

Having previously sold his hand at episodes of 'Deadlys', 'The Running Man' and 'Sport's Not For Losers' in Action, MacManus made his 1980 debut in Prog #195's 'Thrawn Fortune' before penning Prog #201's 'Tokyo'. "I've moved on to join the ranks of writers for M.A.C.H. 1 after having first poached me as a writer on Action," recalls MacManus. "He would give me the kernel of an idea, such as 'An Olympic team of pigs' and would then leave me to develop it into a full script."

MacManus also remembers Mills telling him about his concept for prototype M.A.C.H. agents, who hadn't been as well to the casting/planning process, leading to the creation of the unstable but loved feature M.A.C.H. Zero. "I remember it as if it were yesterday," he recalls. "I was hanging around the News Centre – as I also did a subediting on Battle at the time – and I'd just scribbled

to me, the idea of Hard Metal been a hotbed hotchpot of M.A.C.H. 1 – otherwise known as M.A.C.H. Zero. He then gave me the idea for how the story would turn out and commissioned me to develop into a script which, with a good deal of luck, made to my career."

Illustrated by Flesh's Ramon Sola, 'M.A.C.H. Zero' was released in Prog #41 to 44 from December 1977 to January 1978. With M.A.C.H. 1 also being used in Prog 61 to 64's 'Final Encounter', 'M.A.C.H. Zero' was then spun off into its own series, mostly written by MacManus before handing his own and in 'M.A.C.H. Zero Book Two' in 1980's Prog #162 to 165.

"M.A.C.H. Zero deserved a return after the success of its origin story," says MacManus. "And although my name appears on the credit cards for its first two stories 'Cousin George' and 'The Suit', they were primarily the work of the editorial team at the time, namely (assistant editors) Roy Preston and Nick Landau. I then returned to write the finale in a long story which was superbly illustrated by Mike Dorey. As I recall, the story ended with M.A.C.H. Zero in a free fall and reunited with his son Tommy."

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WHUPWHUPWHUPWHUPWHUPWHUP
COLONEL STEVE AUSTIN, "AMERICAN COUSIN." PLEASED TO MEET YOU.
LIKEWISE, COLONEL AUSTIN--
"STEVE" IS FINE!

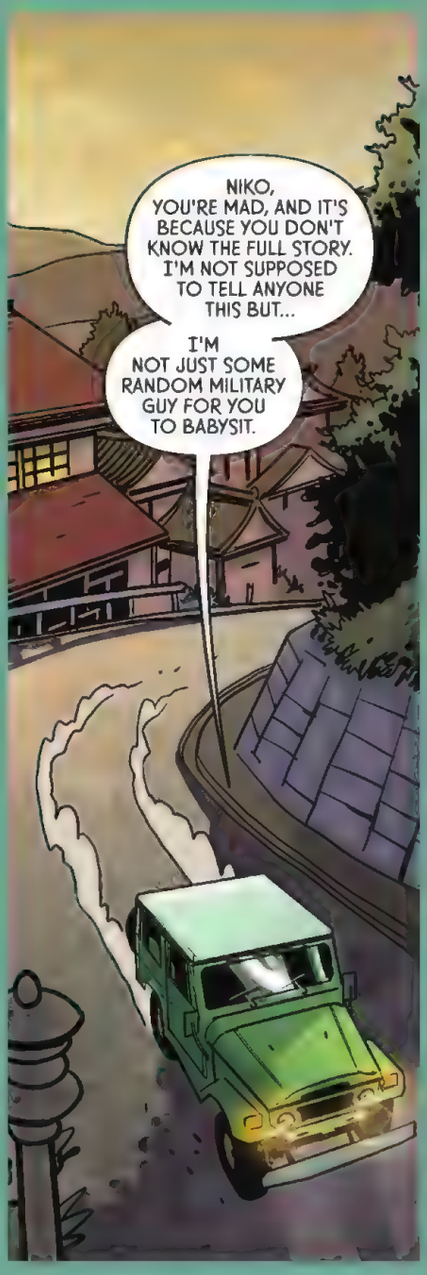
THE SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN

YES, I THINK YOU ARE TRYING TO BE FUNNY TO MAKE ME LESS MAD, AND YOU DEFINITELY ARE NOT.
OOF!
GOT ME.
IF I'M GOING TO SNEAK ONTO SOME NUCLEAR LAUNCH FACILITY WITH ONLY ONE OTHER PERSON TO KEEP ME SAFE, I'D RATHER SHE LIKE ME A LITTLE BIT.

Austin, The Six Million Dollar Man proved extremely popular during its a small screen sequel in the form of the Lindsay Wagner-starring Bionic Woman, it also inspired a spin-off American comic book from the now defunct Charlton Comics, which featured art by industry greats Howard Chaykin, John Byrne and Neal Adams, as well as a weekly strip in British TV tie-in title Look-In, which was penned by the prolific Angus P. Allan and drawn by Garth creator Martin Asbury.

First picking up The Six Million Dollar Man comics licence in 2011, Dynamite Entertainment started out by adapting Kevin Smith's unmade 1990s screenplay Woman and 2013's five-part crossover, The Bionic Man Vs. The Bionic Woman. Now after a break of six years, The Six Million Dollar has returned again in a new five-issue mini-series by Gwenpool scribe Christopher Hastings and artist David Hahn. (Bite Club, Batman '66 Meets the Man from UNCLE)

"I'd been trying to develop something for Dynamite with editor Nate Cosby for a while, and we eventually came to find that we shared some fun, exciting ideas for reflect some of that hotshot astronaut vibe from The Right Stuff, so we gave him story goes on, depreciating from the initial $6 million price tag until he is forced to get more creative with his dwindling resources."


NIKO, YOU'RE MAD, AND IT'S BECAUSE YOU DON'T KNOW THE FULL STORY. I'M NOT SUPPOSED TO TELL ANYONE THIS BUT...
I'M NOT JUST SOME RANDOM MILITARY GUY FOR YOU TO BABYSIT.

Not born until 1983, Hastings obviously didn't grow up watching the original TV series, although he is a fan of Martin Caidin's 1972 novel, Cyborg, on which The Six Million Dollar Man is based. "I used to read tons of pulpy adventure books like that when I was a kid, especially spy books, so I was just hovering them up from the local library," he recalls. "In the original book, Steve Austin really struggles with his perceived loss of humanity, and even attempts to kill himself. He eventually copes and comes to appreciate the new abilities that science – and money! – has granted him, but he's a pretty reluctant secret agent. With this new series, we're flipping it a bit, as Steve is well past any existential crisis, and he's now simply happy to have a new chance at life with

awesome robot powers, although the mechanical parts are a little less incredible, and as much trouble as they are a boon."

Handed the artistic reigns because "Nate Cosby though I would be a great fit with Christopher Hastings's writing," Hahn was eight-years-old when The Six Million Dollar Man first hit TV screens, making him the perfect age for Steve Austin's bionic exploits. "I had the action doll and everything," he laughs. "Part of the appeal for me was hoping in each episode to catch a glimpse of his interior mechanics. The show's opening title sequence always showed his mechanical parts, so I always wanted to see those parts revealed in the show. I was also intrigued by the 'man barely alive' line in the opening sequence, which always made me think that because he was more machine than man, his human existence was always in danger, or in the balance at least, of being lost if his body took too much damage and had to be replaced by robot parts. I always thought or was afraid that his human body parts would slowly be replaced over time with mechanical ones and he would eventually cease to be Steve Austin.

With his various cybernetic limbs and organs, Austin is a superhero in all but name. "The Six Million Dollar Man is a sci-fi, superhero story, and those genres take very nicely to extremely cool comic book illustrations," suggests Hastings. "And there are several times across the series where we have scenes that they wouldn't have been able to film for the original TV show."

"Most any subject can be made to work in the comics medium, so I don't think The Six Million Dollar Man is particularly exceptional or unexceptional," continues Hahn. "As far as the genre of superheroes goes, he is an absolute natural fit, as he is technically superpowered, but he could also easily fit into a comic that's a crime story, a spy story, a sci-fi story or even a comedy.

With Hahn noting that "we've kept the tech appropriate, and by that I mean that it is futuristic, but from a future envisioned in 1975," he and Hastings and Hahn haven't updated the concept of forty-six-year-old show, since the comic itself is handily still set in the 1970s. "We really wanted to embrace the limited power set, and the only major change is that Steve has a laser eye, which was actually first introduced in the Charlton comic series," says Hastings, who has taken Austin out of his natural element by setting the series in Japan.

"We went with Japan for a variety of small reasons that just snowballed into something we felt worked well," he continues. "We wanted to drop Steve into unfamiliar territory where he can't rely on any home support, and we thought that putting him in a country that was making major advances in electronic technology at that time would also be interesting. And we also thought it would be cool to have him fight guys in oni masks with swords!"

Meanwhile, Hahn hasn't modeled his depiction of Steve Austin too closely on Lee Majors himself. "Nate Cosby and I agreed early on that designing a Steve Austin with a dead-on likeness of Lee Majors would not only be too time consuming to draw but would also be distracting," he explains. "We want this to be a story of Steve Austin in the spirit of the TV show, not a version of the TV show in comic book form.

If this initial five-parter proves successful, Hastings hopes that any subsequent series can re-introduce other familiar supporting characters such as Richard Anderson's OSI director Oscar Goldman or even The Bionic Woman herself. "For this relaunch, I wanted to focus on Steve and this adjusted take on his personality and his powers, and just let what's special about him shine through the eyes of the viewpoint character, Niko," he reasons. "I also wanted him to be in real danger without the potential support of the rest of the normal cast, but if this series continues, I really look forward to bringing them in and broadening Steve's world."

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THE DEVILS HAVE TAKEN OVER

Miller, Moore and 'The Daredevils'

May 2019 marks the 40th anniversary of a young newcomer taking on the pencilling of a struggling, bi-monthly Marvel superhero comic.

What quickly become known as 'Frank Miller's Daredevil' met with instant critical acclaim, with a steady rise in sales seeing it compete with Uncanny X-Men for a place at the top of the bestsellers list. Yet Miller did more than merely rejuvenate one particular title - after May 1979 superhero comics would never quite be the same ever again.

By 1983 Miller was moving on, accepting the lucrative offer and creative freedoms offered by DC Comics to produce Ronin. That same year Marvel UK, long a vehicle for reprinting US strips, enlisted editor Bernadette (Bernie) Jaye to produce, on the usual shoestring budget, an exciting new monthly title with reprints of the Miller Daredevil as its centrepiece. Yet Jaye's ambitions went further than showcasing the best that America had to offer; like the brightest shooting star that burns out all too quickly, the Daredevils would prove to be one of the most fondly remembered, if short lived, of Marvel UK titles. Aimed squarely at the more sophisticated tastes of an older UK fanbase, the title marks Marvel UK's own contribution (alongside Dez Skinn's Warrior and Paul Gravett's Escape Magazine) to a particular moment in time when new possibilities were opening up in the UK industry. With America taking an interest in UK titles and creators, it's as if Jaye, caught up in the zeitgeist, was saying 'Look, this Frank Miller guy, he's fantastic! But look what else we've got going on here'.

Sweet dreams are made of this...

At first glance January '83's launch issue gives the impression of being just another Marvel UK monthly of the time. The free gift badge is on par with any launch giveaway of the period and Paul Neary's distinctive cover is of his usual high standard with Daredevil (lending his name to both title and concept) perhaps rightly leading the way ahead of co-stars Captain Britain and Spiderman. Yet a new age is already being heralded; it's actually Captain Britain, now under the aegis of Alan Moore and Alan Davis, who tops the billing, leaving Marvel's supposed leading light Spiderman a distant third, and it's the Moore/Davis strip that leads off proceedings inside.

Still, it's the huge profile of Miller's Daredevil that informs the contents of much of that first issue. A full reprint of Marked for Murder from Daredevil 159, his second as penciller, takes up the lions share of strip pages. The black and white reproduction lends itself well to the midnight setting of the storylines docklands scenario, and it's right here where DD, a character with a 15-year backstory that includes the likes of Stilt-Man and Leap-Frog, becomes the 'grim and sightless devil' of Hells Kitchen, waging war against the underworld and street-level crime in his own backyard. It was remarkable, after years of reading this stuff, to be seized by Miller's immediate influence, with Roger McKenzie's script shifting to accompany the books new look and feel, enhanced superbly by long time inker Klaus Janson. If wearing his Eisner, Kane and Krigstein influences on his sleeve, Miller's work looks just as good reprinted here in '83 as it did in colour in 1979.

Yet from the off the Daredevils had a confidence, an audacity even, to raise the bar further. Leading with what was only the third instalment of the Moore/Davis Captain Britain (plucked from a fast-failing Marvel Superheroes) the strip, at eight pages long, was the longest chapter yet. It's here that one of the finest storylines ever produced in the UK truly blossoms, with Moore's narrative truly taking off and Davis' art transforming itself into a thing of wonder.

Moore himself quickly becomes the axis around which Jaye's new title would revolve. Enjoying one of the most pleasant and easiest of working relationships with an editor he'd ever have, he seemed only too happy to offer up additional copy for little renumeration. His first issue article The Importance of Being Frank offers an insightful look at the Frank Miller phenomenon, praising Miller for his innovation whilst bemoaning the state of mainstream comics in general. Moore recalls stumbling across Miller's debut and appreciating its 'sordid elegance', instantly recognising it as something worthy in an otherwise moribund superhero genre. He celebrates Miller's 'musicians sense of

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rhythm and metre' and his willingness to experiment and break new ground. Citing previous mainstream work such as Jim Sterenko's SHIELD, Neal Adams' Deadman and Jim Starlin's Warlock, Moore seems pleased to have found at last something disproving his theory that 'the good stuff just doesn't sell'.

What's immediately noticeable here is the freedom that Jaye as editor allows Moore the writer, who's basically saying, in the pages of a Marvel UK magazine, that prior to Miller Marvel Comics had, for a very long time, been crap. If not without precedent (Paul Neary had said something similar prior to the September 1981 Captain Britain relaunch - see my Disengage that Elf article in ComicsScene Volume 2 issue 2) it nevertheless shows that a tiny corner of the huge corporate behemoth seemed more than capable of going 'off-message' when it saw the need.

Moore also produced the first of many fanzine review pages, in which he'd become increasingly enthused and immersed with the many small press publications being published, getting to plug the work of some of his favourite creators such as future collaborator Eddie Campbell. A stunning Garry Leech Daredevil colour poster (the first of a run of quality posters from a variety of UK artists) added to the mix, with a small feature showcasing some of the same artists early work a nice accompaniment. A useful news feature also highlighted upcoming comics events, the first of which ironically reported on the upcoming final issue of Miller's initial Daredevil run.

In such a bold and promising debut it's only the inclusion of a mid-1960's Stan Lee/John Romita Amazing Spiderman reprint that seems a mis-step, foisted onto the menu perhaps by a senior management decision. Clearly a classic of its time with a character who still retained huge popularity, the strip seems somehow quaint when placed alongside the two other more contemporary strips.

Moonlight shadow...

Throughout the spring and early summer of '83, the Daredevils reprinted the initial Mckenzie/ Miller/Janson Daredevil issues that had built up sales and acclaim during 1979-80, including the more ruthless, violent retelling of the origin story from Daredevil 164. Indeed, the Miller run had fast become synonymous with violence, something he'd later unashamedly acknowledge. Stereotypical 'fight scenes' where the hero/villain received a pummelling yet showed nary a scratch nor nosebleed had been a staple of superhero comics almost as long as the genre had existed, but refusing to acknowledge the realistic consequences of violence seemed anathema to Miller. At odds with almost everything else then produced, his suddenly seemed the more sophisticated and realistic take on the subject. His detractors were missing the point anyway; the book revolved around the lead character and his unshakable convictions in dealing with the violence, vice and depravity surrounding him, with its central theme best summarised by critic Ed Via in the Comics Journal as 'morality amid violence and corruption'. A fact missed by many, it remained the core difference between Miller's Daredevil and an ultra-violent character such as the Punisher.

With a growing influence Miller began earning a 'co-plotter' credit on a title that had become radically different almost overnight. Yet the trajectory of both main strips in the Daredevils seemed upwards with Moore and Davis increasingly taking Captain Britain to even greater heights. Moore's increasing contribution elsewhere at times gives the false impression of a title becoming his own sole vehicle; his remarkable article on Stan Lee (Blinded by the Hype; an Affectionate Character Assassination) remaining one of the strangest pieces ever to see print in a Marvel magazine. Spread over two issues, Moore began by talking up Lee's legacy, recalling his own wonder upon reading Fantastic Four 3 for the first time at an early age, before then proceeding to tear apart much of what followed after the late 1960's. In truth much of the vitriol seems reserved for others and the watered down 'Stan Lee style' that Lee himself encouraged in his writers after moving on. Moore berated the mantra of 'no change, just the illusion of change' that had set in, which ignored the radical changes Lee himself helped instigate at the beginning of the 1960's. Ending by claiming that the lack of innovation had left a void long overdue being filled, he asks if there's any takers out there for the vacant role. It's possible, given subsequent events, that he's actually asking the question of himself.

That same issue also saw the first part of Moore's examination of sexism within comics, Invisible Girls and Phantom Ladies. The three part article, one of the earliest attempts at shedding light on the treatment of women characters and creators in the industry, reads as plain common sense today, yet it's easy to forget how radical such an article seemed back then.

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Whether highlighting a bound and helpless Wonder Woman, a Batgirl checking her compact mirror prior to battle or a Lois Lane continuously attempting to trap Superman into marriage, Moore doesn't hold back in naming names and pointing fingers at those he sees as the prime exponents of such tripe. The final instalment shed a welcome spotlight on the (then) small number of women creators such as Trina Robbins, Melinda Gebbie, Wendy Pini and the work of Guardian newspaper strip creator Posey Simmons.

Say, say, say what you want...

The title quickly garnered an identity unlike any Marvel UK title before it, and whether inflicting his musical tastes on a bemused readership (obscure Scaffold b-sides and Country Joe and the Fish) or ruminating on the nature sexism, bondage and Robert E Howard's suicide, Alan Moore was at the centre of it all. You know you're onto something when your comic publicly states that the lead writer's opinion 'does not reflect the thoughts and opinions of Marvel Comics management or employees' not in some indiscernible small print disclaimer buried at the bottom of a page, but in its main editorial. Jaye's words actually read more like a badge of honour, and a letter that very same issue celebrating the fact that 'at last real fans seem to be in control of a Marvel UK comic' probably brought a huge smile to her face.

With a smattering of complaints about Moore monopolising so many pages (especially after the title merged with Savage Action and also inherited his Night Raven text stories) Jaye quite rightly saw the need to point out the facts; yes, finding new talent was problematic, yet Pete Scott from fanzine Fantasy Advertiser had produced articles and writer Steve Jones had written reviews. Long time industry writer Steve Moore also provided an interesting set of articles on Chinese and Japanese comics (years ahead of the Japanese 'Manga' boom) and writer/artist (and now Comic Scene columnist!) Lew Stringer also had his very first professional work published in issue seven.

A debate that had opened up on the letters page surrounding the Amazing Spiderman had been quickly resolved with the strip ceasing after issue four. Initially replaced by three Moore Doctor Who back up strips originally published a few years earlier (and showcasing some great art by John Stokes and David Lloyd) they reintroduced the readership to the Special Executive, a group of intergalactic time-travelling mercenaries (with a particularly fluid, ever-expendable line-up) about to be resurrected in the pages of Captain Britain. The group certainly made an impact on the storyline, as did the rather fantastic Davis colour poster that also heralded their arrival. Perhaps wisely, Jaye chose to ignore traditionalist complaints surrounding the temerity of melding Marvel and Doctor Who universes together.

Just got lucky...

The fact that Frank Miller's Daredevil seems the only US material worthy enough to complement the surrounding content is a testament to the quality of the comic Jaye had assembled. Yet it's worth reiterating the milieu in which that comic was forged. A clear impetus was strong competition; Dez Skinn's Warrior magazine had launched in March the previous year, producing original British strips in which Moore and Davis themselves were prominent along with Steve Dillon, Steve Moore, David Lloyd, Steve Parkhouse and many more besides. The two magazines seemed to feed off each other for the briefest of times, raising their game whilst amicably name-checking each other in letter page editorials. Such was the nature of the times that Jaye could feel free to praise a Warrior strip such as V for Vendetta while noting that 'sometimes it's hard to remember which comic company I work for'. There was something in the air, a shared appreciation of working in the industry at a time when many doors opened up. True, many might see having Frank Miller and Alan Moore grace the pages of your comic every month as being merely fortuitous, but let's think about that. The Daredevils Issue 6 saw the Captain Britain instalment run to a whopping eleven pages, the biggest yet, with Jaye publicly thanking 'the two Alans' for providing the extra pages 'at no extra cost'. It's only when the stars align, with people who like and mutually respect each other working together, that such a thing is even possible. Bernie Jaye made her own luck.

As the months went by the remit of the magazine seemed to broaden. A useful overview of the many comic publishers (taking part in what was by then a comics publishing boom) included Aardvark-Vanaheim, Fantagraphics, Pacific, Whitman and DC themselves ('currently much more ambitious than Marvel'). There was a fascinating look at the pulp tradition origins of Night Raven by writer Pete Scott and a remarkable feature on publisher Knockabout, which saw co-founder Carol Benner categorically stating (for the record) that her company didn't endorse experimentation in dangerous substances whilst reporting that they were currently being charged under the Obscene Publications Act of 1959.

Then there's the publication of Grit in issue 8. Along with artists Mike Collins and Mark Farmer (from the Alternative Headmasters Bulletin fanzine) Alan Moore proceeded to lampoon Frank Miller's own tricks and foibles in an acutely observant short Daredevil satire strip. Some readers saw it for the clear homage it was, while others misread the runes and saw it as some kind of sour swipe, with Moore openly mocking Miller. Yet if another instance of Marvel UK happily biting the hand that fed it, a satire by its very nature can only highlight the high regard and massive impact of the source material itself. Produced by fellow journeymen, Grit treads a narrow line but is ultimately no more than a modern-day version of the Not Brand Echh self parodies that the Marvel Bullpen indulged in two decades earlier. It was also extremely funny.

Little red corvette...

Whilst remaining co-plotter Miller took particular joy in visual experimentation, later speaking of how he particularly enjoyed the sequences of DD silently making his way across town. Utilising the rectangular page of the comic itself, he broke down into rectangular panels and further again with the rectangular shapes of the New York skyline, before having the small red shape of Daredevil, all curves, bouncing over the page, a small, burning red beacon against the backdrop of the grey and black that continually threatens to envelop him. Such visual élan never got lost in the black and white reprints of the Daredevils, with Janson's inks increasingly utilising heavy blacks on the red costume anyway, especially at times of high tension or danger. Indeed, Miller would later fight (if not succeed) for later US reprints of the run to actually be reprinted in black and white, keen as he was to experiment as he did with a short story in Bizarre Adventures.

The Daredevils issue nine saw a reprint of

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the infamous Elektra, marking the point were Miller became the latest in a small band of writer/artists working in mainstream superhero comics. Radically altering, or as in this case adding to, a long standing character's backstory would later become quite fashionable (Alan Moore was just as radical in his Swamp Thing debut shortly thereafter) but it's easy to forget just how new and fresh it then seemed. Miller introduces us to Matt Murdock's first love Elektra Natchios, now an assassin for hire willing to kill without a moments hesitation. The polar opposite to Daredevil's moral compass, Miller uses her debut to suggest a possible chink in her armour, hoping to elicit sympathy from the readership, before closing down all possible avenues of redemption in each subsequent appearance. This remarkable writing debut was followed up with the reintroduction of the (now clearly psychotic) villain Bullseye. Obsessed with his previous defeats at the hands of Daredevil and hallucinating wildly ('they've finally done it…the devils have taken over') he goes on the rampage in Times Square, believing his arch-foe to be everywhere. This itself was immediately followed up by the three part introduction of the Kingpin, swiped from the pages of Amazing Spiderman and rebooted here as the shadowy, reinstated mob figure behind the crime sweeping the city. Having assembled his four leading cast members, Miller would take them all on an interwoven journey, resolving itself in the double-sized, groundbreaking Daredevil 181, still one of the most talked about mainstream comic books 40 years later.

Embarking on the storyline with issue nine the Daredevils had never looked in better shape, with reproductions of the Davis split DD/CB cover given away as prizes to readers. Davis' stunning colour poster of Captain Britain adversary the Fury in the next issue was also the highlight in a strong run of quality posters thus far. There still seemed (and those in the know knew there still was) so much more to come, before news of the end came.

The long hot summer just passed me by

Jaye's final editorial in issue eleven announced the news of the forthcoming merger into a relaunched Mighty World Of Marvel in her typically understated fashion, adding '…in further news I will be disappearing from Mighty Marvel. So without getting too slushy I'd like to wish you all the best for the future. Look after yourselves.' Justifiably protective of a title she'd proudly labelled a 'British Marvel Publication', she'd allegedly not been consulted about the forthcoming plans, and understandably turned her back on the company. In typical haphazard Marvel UK fashion, the Miller DD reprints came to a grinding halt mid-storyline, just as the Kingpin was being introduced, without being picked up elsewhere.

It was left to others to articulate just what else was being left behind. An amusing yet heartfelt goodbye to Jaye in strip form from Moore, Davis and letterer Steve Craddock was a nice touch in itself, but just in case anyone had missed the point Moore (who'd said himself way back that 'the good stuff just doesn't sell') went further, spelling things out in a letter printed in the very last Daredevils letters page;

'…without Bernie there wouldn't have been a Daredevils and it's extremely doubtful there would be a Captain Britain, at least in its present form. She's opened up things a hell of a lot, and things are likely to be a lot less timid and reserved in this medium from now on. You see, things like the Daredevils don't happen just like that. Even ordinary comics don't happen just like that and the Daredevils is a little bit more than an ordinary comic.'

Thankfully once, in 1983, it did happen just like that. With the confidence, the audacity even, that comes from knowing what you're doing is good and worthy, the colour centrepiece poster in issue seven boasted '…it's been a long time since comics were as good as this.'

They had a point.

Author: Peter Gouldson | **Twitter:** @gouldp7070
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CORKER!

Great Comics for all our readers

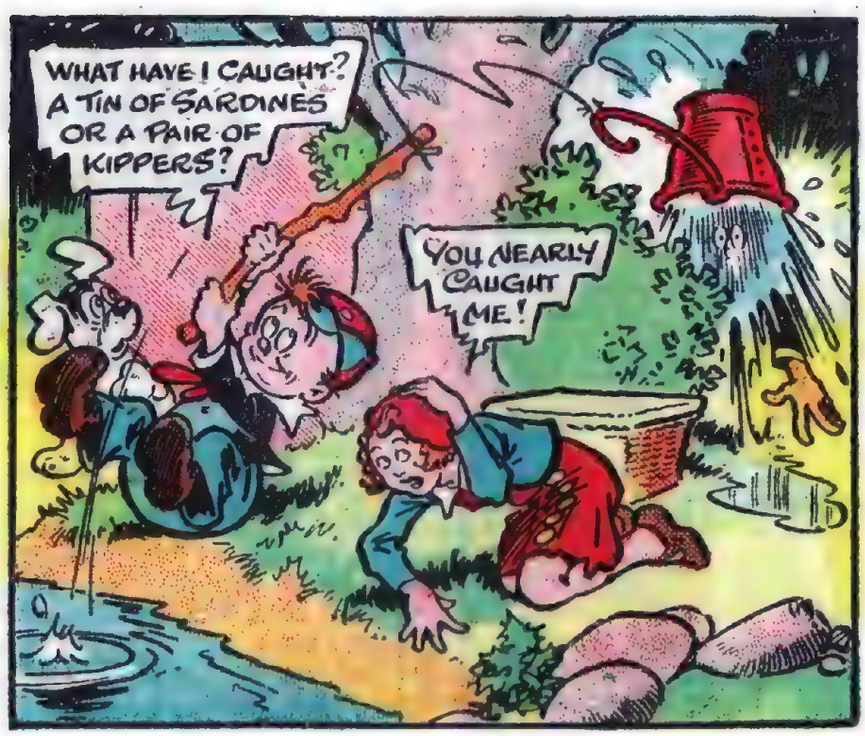
THE GREAT COMIC SCENE FREE COMIC

No. 3. "LURE OF LONDON" READ THIS GREAT DRAMA NOW October 29th, 1938
Flanagan & Allen
Will Fyffe
RADIO FUN
EVERY THURSDAY 2D
Sandy Powell
Clark Gable
"GEORGE, THE JOLLY GEE-GEE"
SLACKING AGAIN, EH? PITY THEY DON'T GIVE YOU SOME WORK TO STOP YOU YAWNING!
WHY DON'T YOU WORK LIKE OTHER FOLKS DO? IF YOU DON'T WORK YOU DON'T EAT!
FANCY STICKING ROUND HERE ON A MORNING LIKE THIS!
STILL IDLING? YOU'LL GO HUNGRY TO-NIGHT, GEORGE!
I'D BE ASHAMED TO BE AS SLOW AS YOU ARE! YOU'LL STARVE - THAT'S WHAT YOU'LL DO! THEY WON'T GIVE YOU ANY LETTUCE LEAVES!
YOU'VE GREASED MY TROUSERS FINE, GEORGE! HERE'S YOUR OATS!
HAW, HAW!

THE MAGIC OF ROY WILSON

Back in issue 2 I mentioned how important Roy Wilson was to the development of British humour comics. I felt he deserved an article all to himself so this month that's who I'm focusing on.

Royston Warner Wilson was born in Kettering, Northamptonshire, on 9th July 1900. He showed an interest in art from an early age, and when war broke out in 1914 he found a job as a junior draughtsman on the Air Board Staff. After being demobbed in 1920, he had a chance meeting with Don Newhouse, a comic artist for The Amalgamated Press. Newhouse was one of the artists who drew in the style made popular by Tom Browne, and it so happened that he needed an assistant. Newhouse appointed Roy Wilson to travel to his house every day, helping out with humour strips for weekly comics such as The Butterfly and Comic Cuts.



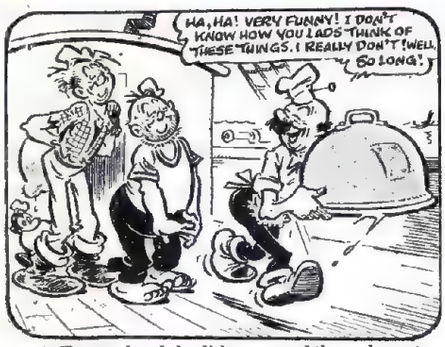
and over that time Wilson's techniques became more accomplished.

By the late 1920's, an editor at The Amalgamated Press encouraged Wilson to submit his own work to the comics. After discussing it with Newhouse, there was an amicable agreement that Wilson would work on some strips alone, as well as continuing to help Don Newhouse with his contributions. The workload was intense, and took its toll. In 1931, close to a breakdown, Wilson took a break from drawing, under doctor's orders.

A year later, Roy Wilson had recovered enough to get back in the game, and it appeared that the respite had done him good. His pages brimmed with life and fun; the hallmarks associated with his style. He was so well regarded that the publishers gave him the cover strips on The Butterfly and on Merry and Bright. His popularity increased, and Wilson's art began to grace more comics

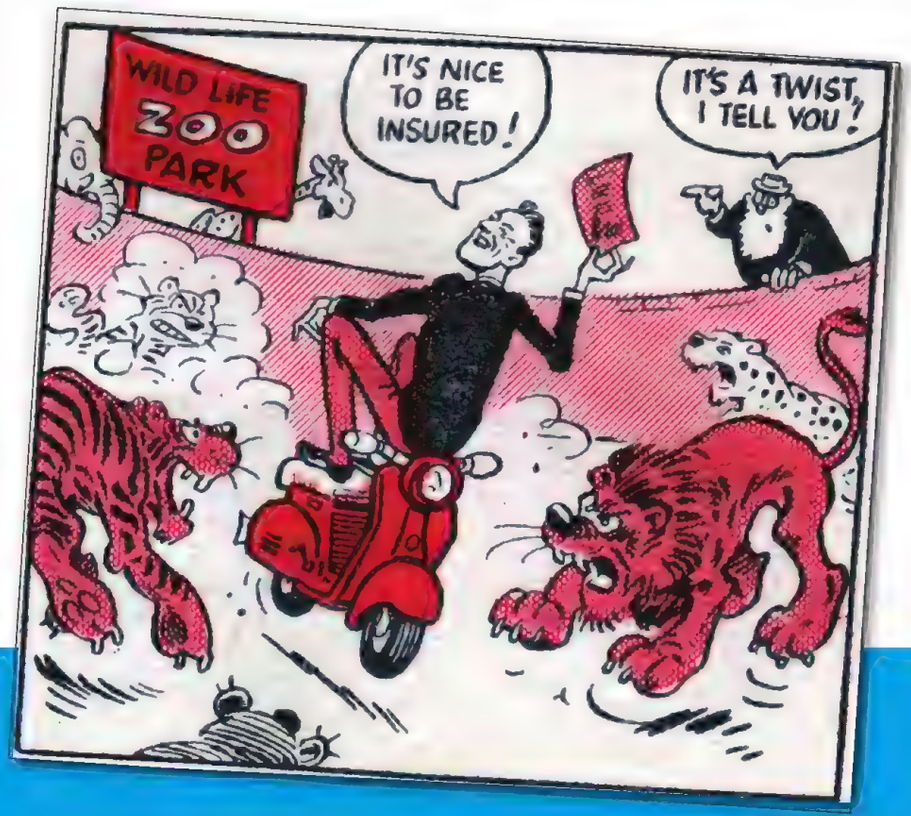
It's understandable that Newhouse would require an assistant back then. Artwork was drawn at least twice the printed size and required a lot of work. Taking their inspiration from music hall comedy, the early comics presented the stories as if from the viewpoint of a theatrical audience; showing full figure shots in every panel and background detail to establish the scene. Close ups and unusual angles were very rarely, if ever, used. In lesser hands, such limitations would have produced very pedestrian strips, but artists such as Newhouse and Wilson imbued their characters with life and vitality. The strips were a delight to the eyes.

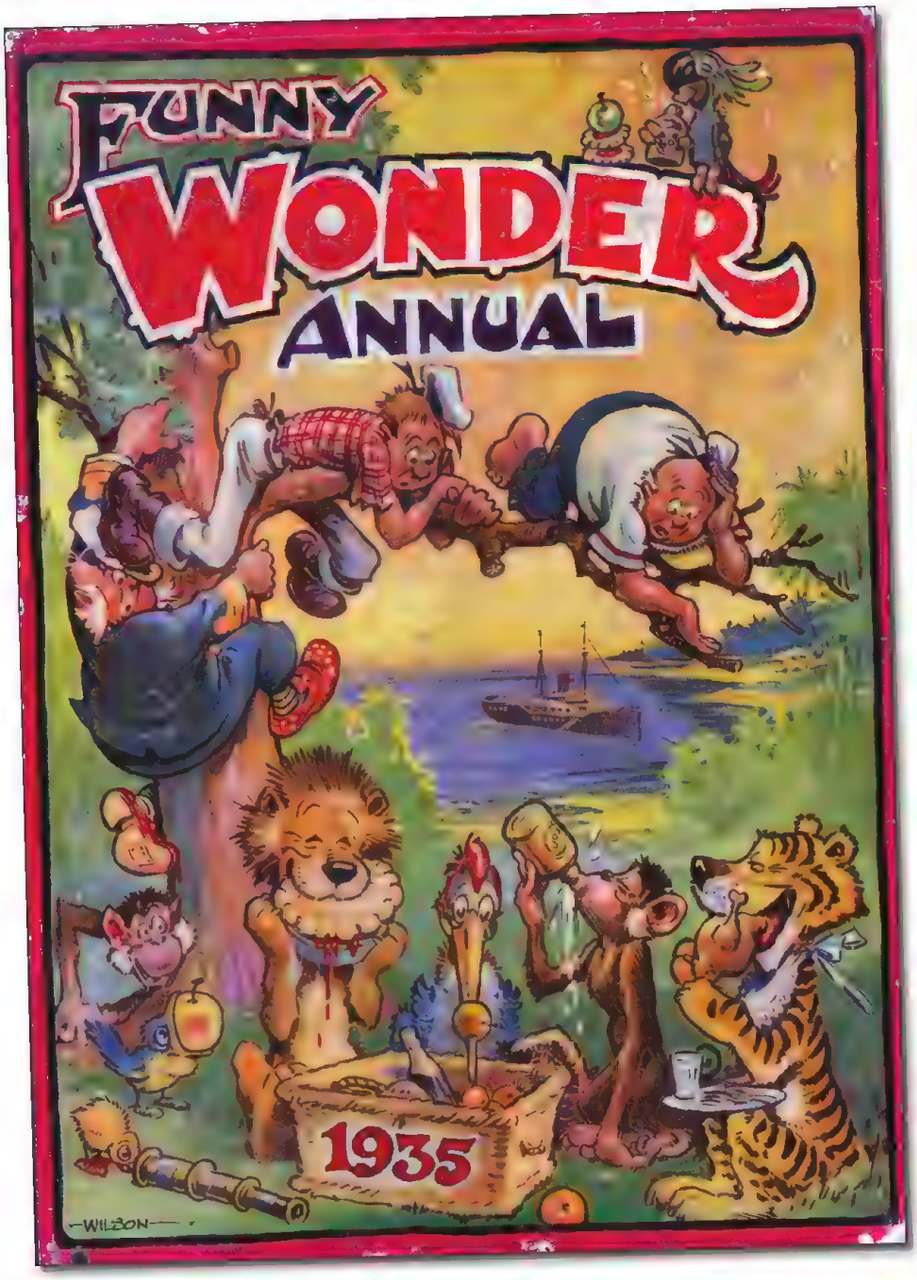
According to the excellent biography The Comic Art of Roy Wilson (Alan Clarke and David Ashford, 1983) "Wilson worked on all drawings indiscriminately, sometimes doing the basic pencil roughs and sometimes inking in those done by Newhouse". In those days, artists would letter their own strips too (as some of us still do today). Naturally, for the two artists to work together successfully, Roy Wilson had to mimic his mentor's art style so that readers couldn't detect any difference. They worked together for several years,



4. Toss replaced the dish cover and the cook went toddling off. "The bird's safe enough," said he. "I can tell that by the weight of it. Mmps!"

5. There were lots of tinned, potted and bottled 'eats on the captain's table and Codseye got ready to feed his fat face.





throughout the 1930s. Wilson had become A.P.'s star artist, and others were told to emulate his style.

In those days, artists who worked on British comics for The Amalgamated Press were forbidden to sign their work. The publishers operated a factory system where creativity was anonymous, and a "house style" was encouraged to give a similarity of styles throughout the comics. However, Roy Wilson's work had become so popular with readers and his editors that he was allowed to sign his name on certain pieces of work, such as covers for the annuals.

Amongst Wilson's regular characters were Pitch and Toss, the comical sailors who appeared in The Funny Wonder. The strip had begun in Lot-O-Fun comic by another artist, but when it moved to the Wonder, it had a new lease of life thanks to Wilson's exuberant brush strokes. Comedy duos had become a popular theme in those early British comics, begun by Tom Browne's Weary Willie and Tired Tim in Illustrated Chips in 1896. By the 1930s there were numerous daft duos engaged in slapstick comic strips. It didn't hurt that Laurel and Hardy were making the crowds roar in the cinemas of course, so

'Given Wilson's penchant for **drawing such upbeat comic strips** it was no surprise that he was given the cover strip'

there was an appetite for characters like Pitch and Toss amusing the readers every week. Roy Wilson excelled at drawing lively comedy scenes featuring humans and animals, giving the characters startled facial expressions and exaggerated body language with them receiving the consequences of their actions in hilarious ways. Every panel was bursting with joy and happiness.

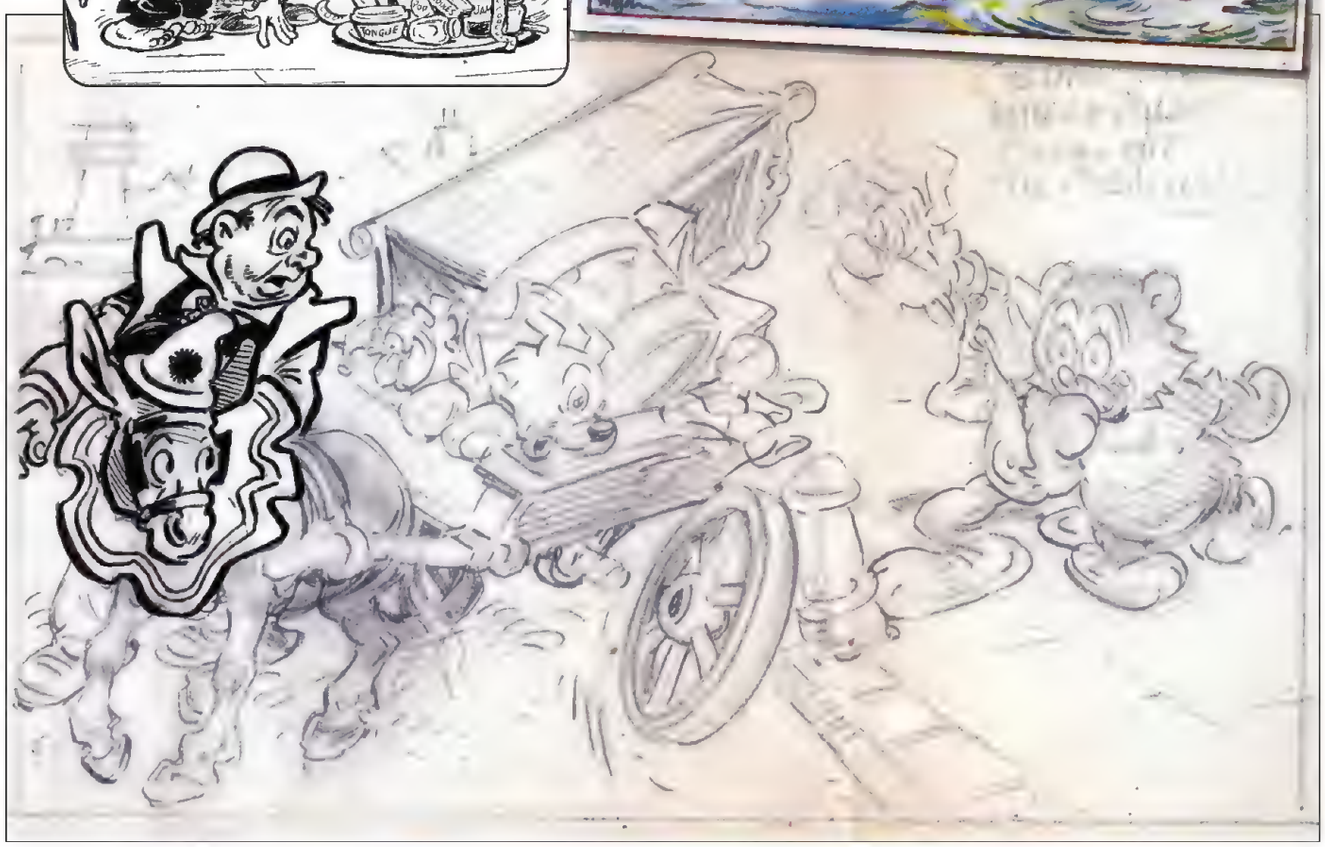
Given Wilson's penchant for drawing such upbeat comic strips it was no surprise that he was given the cover strip, Chimpo's Circus on a glossy new A.P. comic, Happy Days, launched at Christmas 1938. Sadly, it was not to last. The emergence of rival comics Dandy and Beano and their relatively more aggressive style of humour had made the A.P. comics look quaint and dated in comparison. Happy Days lasted just 45 weeks. Some of the other A.P. comics were failing too, and with World War 2 causing paper shortages several titles ended whilst others decreased their dimensions or page count.

Nevertheless, Wilson found work on new titles such as Radio Fun and TV Fun and the long-running Film Fun. It was the age of the celebrity strip and Wilson could caricature his subjects perfectly, whether it was Terry Thomas, Harry Secombe, or Bruce Forsythe.

Wilson was such a perfectionist that he'd often reject panels half-finished, and redraw them with slight modifications, even though the original versions seemed perfectly fine. Some of those unfinished works occasionally turn up on eBay and they give an intriguing insight into his pencil techniques.

Roy Wilson passed away due to cancer in June 1965. His last work was on the Morecambe and Wise strip for Buster. His influence on British comics had been phenomenal, with a style inspiring many artists of the time as well as those who followed him such as Robert Nixon and Brian Walker. Wilson truly gave his readers their happy days.

DESERT ISLAND DISCS.
NOW MR NORMAN NITWIT, YOU ARE ALLOWED TO TAKE EIGHT GRAMOPHONE RECORDS WITH YOU ON THIS DESERT ISLAND — BUT NOTHING ELSE!
I SAY, I DON'T KNOW WHAT I SHOULD DO WITH EIGHT GRAMOPHONE RECORDS — BUT THEN I SHALL NEVER BE STRANDED ON A DESERT ISLAND!
BBC
FIVE MONTHS LATER NORMAN NITWIT IS SHIPWRECKED IN THE SOUTH SEAS
I KNOW WHAT THESE RECORDS SOUND LIKE — I'VE PLAYED THEM ALL DAY AND EVERY DAY FOR THE LAST THREE MONTHS! NOW I'M SO HUNGRY I'LL SEE WHAT THEY TASTE LIKE!



Author: Lew Stringer | **Twitter:** @lewstringer | **Website:** lewstringer.com

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WHACKOMAN!

BY MARC JACKSON

LAST TIME... AFTER A STRING OF PROBING ENQUIRIES, OUR HERO FINDS HIMSELF FACE-TO-FACE WITH A FRUITY NEW NEMESIS!...

KNEEL BEFORE MA'AM-A-LADY!
HUZZAH! MY FIRST FEMALE NEMESIS!
GRANTED, I'D PREFER ONE A LITTLE MORE 'SVELT' BUT COSTUMED BEGGARS CAN'T BE CHOOSERS!
SCHLORP!
INSOLENT, FOOL! I'LL FILL YOUR TIGHTS WITH MY FINEST BATCH AND FIGHT YOU TO THE DEATH!*
OOOOOFFF!
SCHLUB!
UNFORTUNATELY FOR YOU, MY COSTUME IS NON-STICK INCASE OF EMERGENCIES JUST LIKE THIS!...
SHAKE!
SHAKE!
SHAKE!
AND, LAST NIGHT, I STERILISED THIS OVER-SIZED JAR, ON THE OFF-CHANCE!
CLOMP!
CRIME DOESN'T PAY, YOU FRUITY MINX!
FROM THIS DAY FORTH, NO-ONE ELSE SHALL FALL-FOUL OF YOUR MACABRE MIXTURE...
EXCUSE ME WHILST I 'SPREAD' THE WORD TO THE PROPER AUTHORITIES!
(NO) MORE PUNS NEXT TIME!

*YOU'RE WELCOME, SIMON AND GEOFF!

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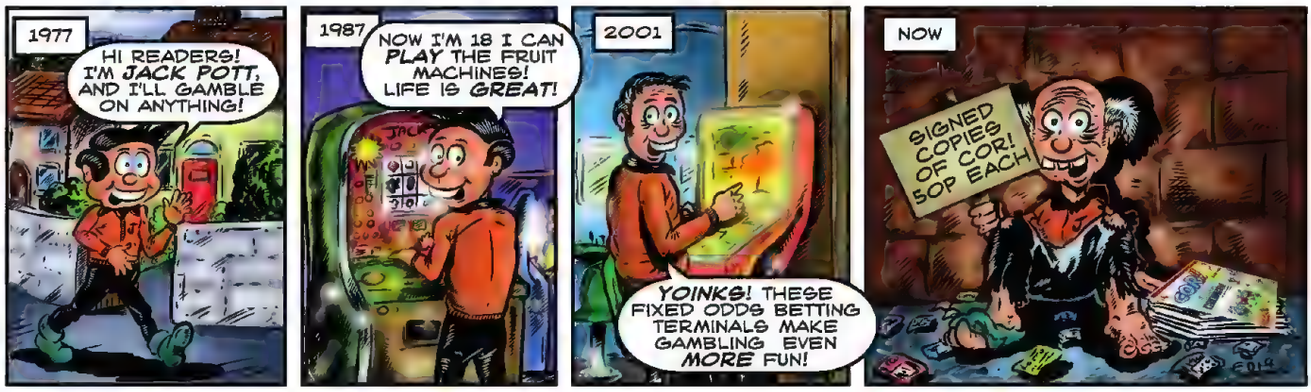
SCENE IT BEFORE: COR! BLIMEY!

SCRIPT: ALAN HOLLOWAY
ART: ED DOYLE

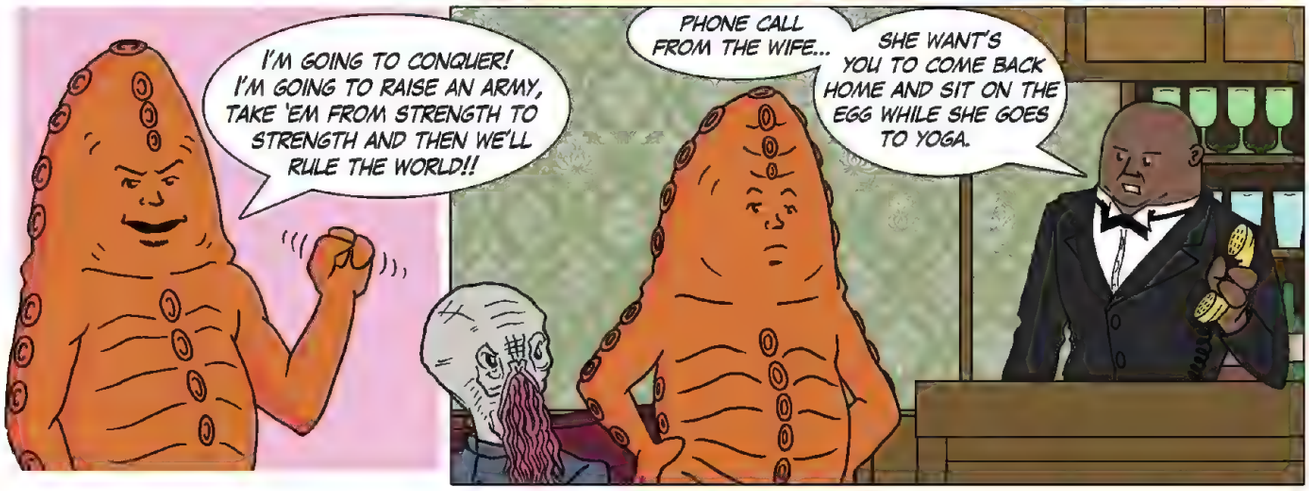

1977
HI READERS! I'M JACK POTT, AND I'LL GAMBLE ON ANYTHING!
1987
NOW I'M 18 I CAN PLAY THE FRUIT MACHINES! LIFE IS GREAT!
2001
YOINKS! THESE FIXED ODDS BETTING TERMINALS MAKE GAMBLING EVEN MORE FUN!
NOW
SIGNED COPIES OF COR! 50P EACH

SCENE IT BEFORE: THE RICH LIST

SCRIPT: ALAN HOLLOWAY
ART: ED DOYLE

GREETINGS PEASANTS. I HEREBY DECLARE THAT I'M THE RICHEST BRITISH COMICS CHARACTER
NO WAY! I'M THE RICHEST! YEE HAW!
RECKON IT'S US- IT'S IN THE TITLE, AIN'T IT! BILLIONAIRES!
SORRY, LADS, BUT I THINK IT'S ME. I SELL DENNIS'S DAD HIS SLIPPERS!
BAH!

The ZYGON's


I'M GOING TO CONQUER! I'M GOING TO RAISE AN ARMY, TAKE 'EM FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH AND THEN WE'LL RULE THE WORLD!!
PHONE CALL FROM THE WIFE...
SHE WANT'S YOU TO COME BACK HOME AND SIT ON THE EGG WHILE SHE GOES TO YOGA.

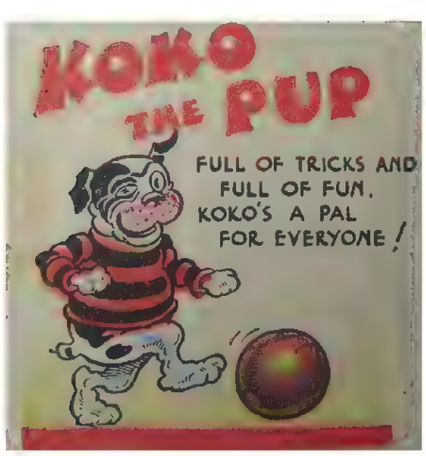
phil-comics presents...

The story of an elusive British comic

THE MAGIC COMIC 1939-1941

DC Thomson's Magic Comic lasted a mere eighty issues, from July 1939 to January 1941, before it fell victim to war-time paper shortages. A reluctant logistical sacrifice was made by its publishers in order to maintain a ready supply of paper on which to print its more established titles, including Magic's older comic stablemates, the now legendary Dandy and Beano. And now, because of those decisions made nearly seventy years ago, the Magic comic, unlike its illustrious siblings, is not the stuff of legend but merely an elusive, somewhat enigmatic footnote in the history of British comics. This is its story.

The Magic Comic was the third weekly comic title to be released by Dundee based publishers DC Thomson following in the successful wake of the Dandy (1937) and Beano (1938), but it was not quite in the same format or aimed at quite the same audience as its older sisters. Its page size was the same as was the price (2d) but for their tuppence the reader only got 24 pages compared to the Dandy and Beano's 28, the reduction in pages being compensated for by the addition of full colour to Magic's centre spread and back page. And, while not being an out and out nursery title, it was certainly aimed at a younger readership with many of its comic strips being supplemented with a four-line rhyming verse printed beneath each individual drawing, explaining the action above as well as many of its storylines having a fairytale feel about them.



The Magic's cover star throughout its run was Koko The Pup, a loveable pug-dog, canine counterpart to the Dandy's Korky The Cat and drawn for the most part by Harry E.H. "Harry" Banger (pronounced Bainjer), who was an accomplished comic artist whose career at DC Thomson was sadly brief. He was lured away by publisher Gerald Swan in 1940 to work on his new range of comic titles and leaving Koko's adventures to be completed by Jimmy Crighton (the Korky the Cat artist and designer of the Magic's front page 'conjuror' logo) and then Robert McGillivray.

Koko The Pup was one of five comic strips that featured in Magic throughout its run and the next, in order of page appearance, was 'Dolly Dimple – not so simple' – a rare full-page effort from the master of the two-line gag strip Allan Morley – a strip about a seemingly sweet little girl whose 'sugar and spice' façade hid a rather more crafty core.

Then, the great Dudley Watkins provided the artwork for the paper's third, ever

present strip 'Peter Piper – picking people out of pickles' in which Peter, who closely resembles one or other of the twins from Dudley's Sunday Post Fun Section strip 'The Broons', is gifted a magic flute by a statue of the Greek God Pan in the local park. A toot on the flute allowed the lad to bring inanimate characters to life, be in their paintings, on billboards or hewn from stone in order to help folks in trouble.

Next up, and covering the Magic's full colour centre spread, came 'The Tickler Twins in Wonderland', drawn by Robert McGillivray. The eponymous twins, Mick and Trixie, beginning their adventures when they are led down a rabbit hole by their new pet bunny, who also just happens to be the Lord Chamberlain of the subterranean world of Wonderland, a fantastical place ruled over by King Boz and populated by all manner of fairytale

and nursery rhyme characters from Jack the Giant Killer to Humpty Dumpty.

Eye catching colour was then also a feature of Magic's fifth and final ever present strip, the back page adventures of 'Sooty Snowball'. Little black boy Sooty has to try and get to grips with the 'mod-cons' of the Western world when he is 'rescued' from his low-tech jungle life by safari devotees Sam Coot and his wife. The Sooty strip was the Magic's one and only foreign reprint until No. 26, when homegrown efforts drawn by Robert McGillivray began to appear.

Other significant comic strips that debuted in Magic No. 1 included 'Uncle Dan the Magic Man' (1-42) and 'Tell-tale Tilly' (1-59), both drawn by the same, sadly still unidentified, artist. Uncle Dan was a jolly, helpful old cove who comes to people's assistance with the aid of his 'queer old stick' or magic wand and bespectacled Tilly was a little girl who loves to get others into trouble with her tittle-tattle. Other than these there was also 'The Adventures of Grandfather Clock' (1-42) drawn by Alan Fraser about a houseful of far from inanimate objects, Phil Millar's inscrutably cheerful Chinaman 'Wee Hi-Lo' (1-42), Harry Banger's mischievous kittens 'Inky, Binky and Fluff' (1-46), Arthur Jackson's worldly wise tramp 'Ugly Muggins' (1-50) and Sam Fair's 'Boy Biffo the Brave' (1-65), a comic strip version of Grimm's fairytale 'The Valiant Little Tailor' which had also been turned into a Mickey Mouse cartoon story 'The Brave Little Tailor' the previous year.

In the Magic version Biffo is a medieval gardener's boy who fantasises about being a brave knight and, one day, while keeping a swarm of flies from devouring his lunchtime bread and cheese he kills nine of them with one swat of his trowel, a feat he then decides to commemorate with the legend 'One Biff Slew Nine' embossed on a homemade shield. When, later, people assume that Biffo's shield refers to slightly more worthy opponents the boy does nothing to disillusion them and he is hailed as a brave warrior and just the kind of hero to take on the Middle Ages' answer to a certain European dictator, Wizard Wittler.

The comic strip content of the Magic's early issues was then completed by Arthur Jackson's rotund, top-hatted, prank playing millionaire 'Sam Swell' (1-29), the tuba-playing bandsman 'Oompah Pete' (1-29), featuring some of the first artwork from long time Thomson staff artist George Drysdale, Chick Gordon's baby elephant 'Little Squirty' (1-19) and the porcine, Pigg Family 'Pa, Ma and Squeaker' (1-19), another effort from artist Alan Fraser. The out and out fun content of the paper finally rounded off with the 'Magic Joke Page' (1-65) for which Chick Gordon provided several illustrations each week.

Comic strips aside, the early issues of Magic also featured a two page adventure strip entitled 'The Seven-Foot Cowboy' (1-19), drawn by James 'Peem' Walker, in which good-natured 'Shorty' Bill Brand, the tallest cowboy in the Wild West, accepts the job as sheriff of tough, cow town Boulder Gap.

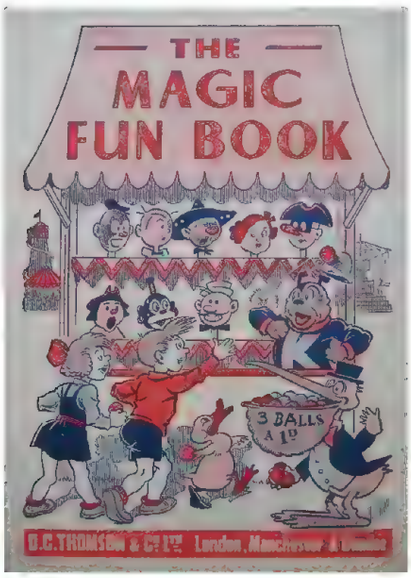
Finally, and in line with most other comic titles of the time, a third of Magic's twenty-four pages was given over to four 2 page text stories. 'The Boy with the Golden Goose' (1-42), illustrated by Dudley Watkins, 'Cheeky Mary – the Lord Mayor's Daughter' (1-42), illustrated by Fred Sturrock, 'Poor Blind Billy' (1-38) and 'Val in the Magic Forest' (1-29), the latter two both illustrated by Richard 'Toby' Bains.

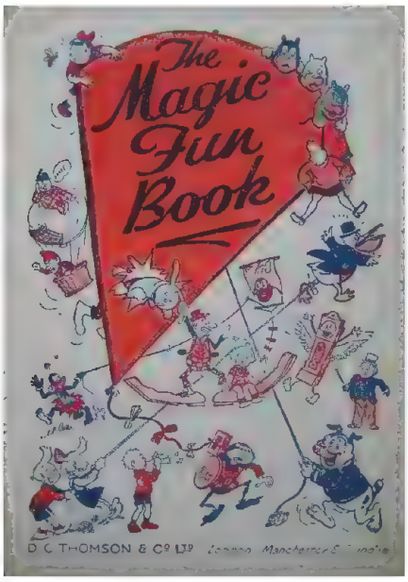
In the medieval fantasy, 'The Boy with the Golden Goose', a lad named Alwin Goodheart becomes the intended victim of a murder plot instigated by the wicked King Jarl, who has been told by a soothsayer that he will lose his throne to a boy with one blue and one brown eye, striking physical attributes possessed by young Alwin. The lad was only saved from a watery grave by the intervention of a magical, golden egg laying goose.

As to Lord Mayor's daughter Mary Martin, she brings fun to staid council proceedings when she steps in as Lady Mayoress of Brayfield, while her mother pays a visit to Australia. The humour of the Cheeky Mary story is balanced with the sheer melodrama of 'Poor Blind Billy', a tale of two children, one a sightless violin prodigy on the run from their avaricious, uncaring guardians. The final story of the quartet, 'Val in the Magic Forest' sees us back in medieval times again to relate the tale of a young orphaned apprentice to a cruel shoemaker who, following an act of kindness to Ramus the Magician, the Keeper of the Great Forest of Blondel, is given the power to turn himself into any forest animal he chooses at the mere utterance of an incantation.

Beyond those items featured in its first issue the Magic, by its close, would introduce its readers to a further 15 comic strips, 3 adventure strips and 10 text stories. With the later comic strips including James Clark's 'Leave it to Lop-Ears' (20-46) who had been a firm favourite for nearly two decades in the recently discontinued pocket-size nursery magazine 'Fairyland Tales' produced by Thomson's co-publishers John Leng, John R. Mason's clown-footed creation 'Tootsy McTurk' (30-80), the Sam Fair double, time-twisting 'Old Father Time' (43-80) and 'The

WAIT A MINUTE! HERE'S A NEW HIT
First you spin it
Then you chew it!
FREE
IN A FORTNIGHT'S TIME
RAZZLE DAZZLE
LICORICE SPINNER
THIS IS A BIG SUGAR SWEET
THIS IS JUICY LICORICE
IMPORTANT THIS NOTICE HAS BEEN PRINTED EARLY SO THAT YOU CAN ORDER YOUR COPY OF "THE MAGIC" WELL IN ADVANCE
ORDER NOW! THERE'S A GREAT NEW STORY AND 3 FUNNY NEW CARTOONS AS WELL AS THIS GREAT FREE GIFT
IT'S GIVEN ONLY WITH
THE MAGIC COMIC
ON SALE THURSDAY MAY 9TH
PRICE 2D





Bellowing Bell-man', town crier 'Ding-Dong Dally' (43-80). The two war inspired creations, evacuee fun with the young lad 'Vicky the Vacky' (30-46) and the nit-wit of espionage 'Herr Paul Pry – the Nasty Spy' (43-80) were also present. Finally, not forgetting the ornithological wisdom dished out by the trilby hated, waistcoat wearing, umbrella toting 'Old Pop Pelican' (30-80).

As to the three further Magic adventure strips these were all, like the first, drawn by James 'Peem' Walker and had heroes as diverse as a young clan chief from the 18th century 'The Wolf Boy of Badenoch' (20-45), an ancient Briton living 10,000 years ago 'Beric the Cave Boy' (47-67) and Sherwood Forest's most famous son 'Robin Hood' (68-80) an eclectic range of heroes and themes also reflected in Magic's opus of later stories.

"Nonetheless, the Thomson Editorial staff had **not entirely forgotten the title** that they had lost to the war...."

That scope, ranging from the nautical Arabian Night's wanderings of 'Sinbad the Sailor' (30-46) to the story of a young chap who can speak to animals thanks to ownership of an enchanted marble 'Sammy's Magic Stone' (39-60) and a Dickensian type tale of a 19th century lad robbed of his rightful fortune and forced to become a chimney sweep's climbing boy 'Little Orphan Andy' (43-51). The further adventures of Alwin Goodheart and his precious egg-laying companion, 'The King with the Golden Goose' (43-51), was also seen. And then, from a golden egg laying goose Magic introduced its readers to 'The Keeper of the Flock' (62-79) and his flock of golden-fleeced sheep while the ever-present rumblings of the war provided a backdrop for a trio of tales. 'Kipper Feet' (46-80), the story of a young walrus befriended by British sailors and used a secret weapon against German U-boats, two British children lost in occupied Holland in 'Two wanderers of the war' (52-61) and the tale of a British boy 'adopted' by a fighter crew in 'Pete of the Spitfires' (70-80).

Born as it was at the outbreak of World War II and even before it fell victim to the rigours of wartime paper shortages, there is no doubt that the conflict had several fundamental effects on the course of the Magic's production. Not least of these was the loss of its original editor, Bill Powrie, who was with the comic for its first year, before war service saw him replaced by an editorial veteran from the boys' papers dept, Andy Hunter.

By the time of its cancellation in January 1941, paper shortages had already had their effect on the Magic to the extent that only 16 pages of the original 24 remained, but still it was not enough and more drastic economies had to be made and Thomson's had to make the hard, but inevitable, decision to suspend production of their most junior comic title.

So it was that in issue 80, dated Jan 25th 1941, there was printed an editorial message which promised that although the Magic had to cease production for the time being, it would return when circumstances allowed and, to be fair to Thomsons, they did try their best to keep the faith with that promise. Their main ploy in this regard being the transformation of The Beano Book and The Magic Fun Book (Magic's own annual which had appeared for the years 1941 and 1942) into the combined Magic-Beano Book for a full eight years (1943-1950) with each of these annuals containing at least a smattering of comic reminders from the Magic's pages. But, despite all the publisher's best efforts, the paper restrictions, both during and after the war, continued for far longer than hoped until, in the end, the Magic and its characters had faded from memory. As a consequence, when Thomsons did feel able to add another regular title to their comic stable once again, in 1953, it was not the revived Magic that returned, but a wholly new title, the full coloured, tabloid sized Topper.

Nonetheless, the Thomson Editorial staff had not entirely forgotten the title that they had lost to the war, nor its young Editor and as a small tribute when the first issue of Topper was published, the 'Mickey the Monkey' strip that appeared on the front cover was a version of the 'Koko the Pup' strip that had been published on the front cover of the first issue of Magic all those years before.

Not that this was quite the end of the story as a few Magic favourites would return in various forms and in various places over the ensuing years, most particularly in the pages of Sparky, first published in January 1965. For example, the title character Sparky himself was a development of 'Sooty Snowball', 'Boy Biffo the Brave' being given a straight adventure strip interpretation in 'Seven at One Blow' and

most successfully 'Peter Piper' who first turned up Sparky #3 with his Magic origin intact and continued on through the rest of the comics 652 issues and further into the amalgamated pages of Topper until 1988. In 1976 Thomsons even saw fit to issue a new nursery comic under the title 'Magic' which ran for twice as long as the original, 161 issues, before merging with Twinkle. But nothing remained of the original but its name – the Magic had gone.

Bill Powrie (1916-1942)

Magic Editor Bill Powrie was born William Shanks Powrie in Dundee in 1916, the son of William Shanks and Annie Swadel Powrie. He attended the town's Harris Academy, as had Dandy and Beano Editors Albert Barnes and

George Moonie before him, and joined Thomsons immediately from school as the youngest sub-Editor on the boy's paper Rover, in July 1933, where he fell under the mentoring hand of the paper's editor, and soon the Managing Editor of all Thomson's juvenile publications, R.D. Low.

Within three years he was not only a chief-sub on the Rover but also, under R.D. Low's guidance, the first Editor of that Scottish institution in the making, the Sunday Post Fun Section. Then, after a spell as a sub-Editor on The Dandy in 1938 prepared him for the role, he was given the Editorship of his own fully fledged comic title – the Magic – in July 1939. His flair for constructing comic rhymes perfectly suiting him for the paper's nursery style.

Bill Powrie remained Editor of both the Magic comic and the Sunday Post Fun Section until April 1940, when he left Thomson's to enlist in the Scot's Guards, having just completed putting together the first Oor Wullie book. A follow up to the successful publication of the first Broons book the previous year, which he had also edited, and for which he had devised and written the vernacular rhyming couplet headlines - a mainstay of Broons and Oor Wullie books to this day.

After Officer training Bill Powrie was duly gazetted a 2nd Lieutenant in the 1st Battalion Royal Scots Fusiliers, which he joined in June 1941 and, while waiting to be posted overseas, he married his wife May.

Tragically, during the first amphibious assault undertaken by Commonwealth Forces in WWII, codenamed Operation Ironclad, to wrest the harbour of Diego Suarez situated on the island of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean, from Vichy French forces, Bill Powrie was killed by machine gun fire attempting to help create a beach head on the morning of the 6th May 1942. He was 26 years old.

2nd Lieutenant William S. Powrie, 1st Battalion Royal Scots Fusiliers, was laid to rest in Diego Suarez War Cemetery and lies there still along with 313 other Commonwealth servicemen who died that day.

This article was diligently researched and written by Ray Moore and originally published in May 2009 in issue 8 of 'The Beano & Dandy Collectors' Club' newsletter. The newsletters were published by Phil Shrimpton and are available to download on his vintage comic auction website: www.phil-comics.com. All images contained in this article are © D.C. Thomson & Co., Ltd. and used with their kind permission.

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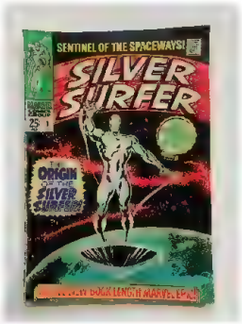

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THE DRAGON'S CLAWS DUO ARE AT IT AGAIN THEIR WAY!

TO THE DEATH™

favourite stint on Transformers comic, (writer) Simon Furman and (artist) Geoff Senior were chosen to spearhead Marvel UK's big push into US-format comic publishing with Dragon's Claws, an action sci-fi – rather than superhero – saga set on a future Earth teetering on the brink of a self-inflicted apocalypse. Channeling a lot of the anarchic, hard-edged attitude of seminal British sci-fi comic 2000 AD and stark eco-themed undercurrents (making it somewhat ahead of the curve back then), Dragon's Claws ran for ten-issues and launched the blackly comic 'freelance peacekeeping agent' Death's Head (nowadays a Marvel US mainstay) into the wider comics world.

Thirty-something years later Furman and Senior are at it again, hurtling us into another dystopian future teetering on the edge of eco-implosion, the victim of malign and covetous forces that have bled planet Earth to the point of a natural resources drought. To The Death was originally conceived and executed as a web comic, presented entirely in full-[illegible] format panels – some 1500 of them over 18 digital episodes. "The web series garnered plenty of great feedback from fans," Furman told us, "but the overriding thing we kept getting was, 'when is it coming to print?' and so – a couple of years later – here we are!"

To The Death – the 10-issue print maxi-series – kicks off this June and continues every four weeks into 2020. Furman describes it as "coming from that hard-edged, gritty Dragon's Claws place," with a dash of Colonial Marines and Starship Troopers, and even a new character, Killatoa, who steps into the Death's Head role. "It's like our greatest hits but at the same time something brand new," observes Furman, "and really plays into the kind of stuff I like to write and Geoff loves to draw. Give Geoff a whole world to imagine, envision and breathe life into and he's as happy as a kid in a sandpit. Give him a whole lot of static talking heads and he just sulks. I'm kidding, but Geoff's art is summed up by words like 'kinetic' and 'visceral', and so – to bring out the best in him – To The Death had to have pace, breadth, utterly larger than life, bonkers action and grand, high-stakes set pieces. We both viewed the whole thing as a single massive blockbuster movie, right down to the shooting board style Geoff adopted to draw it."

The series centres around Aleksy Dryagin, a career soldier ('Pacifier') and recent father who returns from fighting off-world wars on behalf of malign corporate entity The Tri-Corp to find that putting down his guns and picking up where he left off with his wife and young son is not an option. Instead, he's marked for death, the pawn in a power struggle between the omnipotent Triumvirate and subversive organization White Noise. Stubbornly, Dryagin proves he's no one's pawn, and the Triumvirate soon realise that you pick a fight with Dryagin… it's To The Death. Populated with colourful characters – such as evolved fish-man and 'soldier-of-fortune' Killatoa and Dryagin's crack Scourge platoon of Pacifiers, including highly volatile pyro-warfare expert Kraken, To The Death is grand scale and relentless action all the way, building to a truly Earth-shattering conclusion.

Q&A

with Simon Furman & Geoff Senior, co-creators of To The Death

Rather than take To The Death the usual route to market - via an established publisher and Diamond Distributors, who form the traditional connective bridge between publishers and comic stores - Furman and Senior opted to self-publish their To The Death print series, with a twist. They - as Forged By Fire Productions - formed a publishing partnership with Comic Toolbox, an Internet-based 'one-stop shop' and pull-list for fans, in the process of branching out and developing their own 'indie' publishing portal. Comic Toolbox would effectively facilitate To The Death's route to both individual buyers and comic book stores nationwide, becoming both publisher and distributor in one. "It was perfect for us," explains Furman, "as it gave us the freedom to be creatively independent and free from oversight and other people's opinions, but at the same time provided the logistics and infrastructure to physically get the comics into readers' hands. It's still been hard, hard work - both creatively, especially for Geoff reformatting the entire web series into standard (US) comic book format, and organizationally, as it's fully 'hands on' in terms of marketing, publicity and so forth. But also hugely rewarding. The success, or otherwise, of To The Death is exclusively in our - and Comic Toolbox's - hands, and that's a continually exciting and challenging place to be in, day in and day out."

To The Death issue #1 goes on sale on June 19th, and is already available for pre-order from comic book stores or via getmycomics.com.

Subscriptions - and various incentives and exclusives - to the whole 10-issue series are also available. For more information check out www.to-the-death.com

ComicScene: Tell us about the genesis of To The Death!

Simon Furman: It came out of two 'needs'. The first was to create something original and exciting that came wholly from us – without anyone telling us what we could or couldn't do, or what they thought would or wouldn't work. That meant going the creator-owned/self-published route. The second was to re-channel some of our early creative drive on series like Dragon's Claws and Death's Head (both Marvel UK) into something new and fit for purpose in today's comic book market. Dragon's Claws particularly came out of that anarchic, more sci-fi than spandex UK comics legacy, a very hard-edged and visceral but darkly humorous vein of storytelling that we Brits tend to excel in.

Geoff Senior: Career-wise, I'd moved out of comics art and more into storyboarding for advertising, and was keen to flex those muscles again. I've never been that into standard superheroes, always preferring the grittier, darker style of those classic UK war/sci-fi comics or something like John Buscema's Conan work. So when Simon suggested we channel that Dragon's Claws vibe into something new, I was completely up for it.

CS: To The Death made its debut digitally, as a series of 'episodes' rather than comic books. What was the thinking behind that?

SF: The format gave us both greater freedom to let To The Death breathe and evolve into a grand, high-stakes epic – more like an action movie – without the constraint of actual printed pages. I wrote the series in a very loose screenplay format, with some (but by no means all) dialog, enough to give Geoff the flavour of the story and the characters anyway, and he was then free to adapt it as he saw fit – in as many screen-sized panels as he wanted. Then, later, I layered in more or less dialog as necessary. Often the latter.

GS: I draw in a fully digital format these days, and the less structured approach made it easier for me to break down the story in a fast, fluid fashion – focusing on small or large action beats in a way not dissimilar to manga, with lots of micro-beats. I saw the whole of To The Death as one massive movie shooting board, with that same widescreen energy and moment-to-moment pacing. Reformatting the strip for print worked surprisingly well, though, and I'm really pleased with how it's looking on a more standard comic book page.

CS: You both have a strong and enduring relationship with TRANSFORMERS. Was it tempting to make To The Death a mecha-led project?

SF: Having worked with Geoff for many years and many different projects, I'm aware of what he likes to draw and what brings out the best in him as an artist, so while there was – and is – that strong connection to TRANSFORMERS and its fanbase we both wanted to steep the project in the other strings to our respective bows. That kind of gritty subversive sci-fi that 2000 AD excels in, holding up a warped mirror to the world we live in today, was what we had channeled in Dragon's Claws – and to an

Simon Furman is a script and screenwriter, renowned for his long association with TRANSFORMERS. He is the co-creator (with Geoff Senior) of Dragon's Claws and Death's Head, and has written for Alpha Flight, Robocop, Terminator and many more. His current work includes Robotech for Titan, The Vigilant for Rebellion and Transformers: The Definitive G1 Collection for Hachette.

Geoff Senior is an illustrator and storyboard artist with a proven track record of outstandingly kinetic work in both the comic book and advertising indus-tries. He is noted for his work on Transformers, Judge Dredd, Death's Head and Dragon's Claws. Senior runs his own advertising art agency Smudge Pencil and provides guest-art on the likes of Transformers: Requiem of the Wreckers.

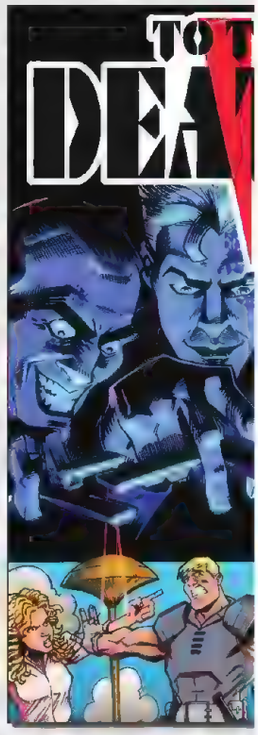
extent Death's Head – and what we wanted to get back to. Throw in a dash of Starship Troopers and Colonial Marines and that's what To The Death is in a nutshell. I've always loved the idea of one man against the system, the cause (almost) already lost, too bloody-minded to back down and determined to fight his corner. That lone voice in the crowd who's been pushed and pushed… and won't take it any more.

GS: Unlike some of the more current TRANSFORMERS artists, I never set out wanting to draw giant robots – it was just something I did a lot of back in the day, and am happy to revisit now and then, such as in the recent Requiem of the Wreckers one-shot. But for this project, I wanted to get back to the kind of comics I grew up with. Get that raw, adrenaline-fuelled energy, intensity and fluidity back into the panel borders. Simon dropped a few mechs in there too, but largely To The Death is a back-to-basics, human-level story set against the kind of vast futuristic and alien backdrop that allows me to do the large-scale world building that I love. The story never stops, the pace never flags, and that just gives me the creative energy to really go wild with the art. If I'm excited by what I'm drawing, that migrates to the page and the art, and I do my best work.

CS: Having opted to go digital with the series, where did the print prequel story Forged By Fire fit in?

SF: Initially – or at least, a few episodes into the project – we looked at crowdfunding To The Death, but quickly realised it's hard to incentivize something that only exists in digital form. Sure, we could offer subscriptions to the series or art prints, but the crowdfunding model, certainly for comic books, works best with a desirable printed end product. So we looked at a one-shot, deluxe-format hardback To The Death print comic book that wouldn't take away from the ongoing digital series or be so crucial, story-wise, that readers of the digital series would miss key plot points without it. Forged By Fire, set five years before the main series begins, focuses on Scourge Squadron's inaugural mission to the planet Asphodel, and while the salient points of that first mission are reprised in the digital series, there's plenty of extra stuff in the prequel you won't get otherwise.

GS: We wanted to make sure that the print comic, Forged By Fire, and the digital series didn't end up looking like a mismatched pair. So I opted to draw Forged By Fire in landscape format, with each page more or less a splash page, almost like putting the digital series directly into print. Simon made sure there was a lot more dialog and so forth than in the digital series, which is sometimes sparse just because there are so many frames, so it felt like a proper 'read'. Some 'splash' pages are actually multi-panel pages, but the overall effect is still a single image per page.



CS: What happened next with Forged By Fire?

SF: It didn't get funded. We set the bar pretty high, maybe too high, in terms of the funding total we wanted to reach. So the one-shot never went to print. Instead the digital series ran its course and then our whole attention moved to the print To The Death. But we still had this prequel that we were really pleased with and wanted people to see. Which is when we started talking to Tony at Comic Scene.

GS: I had already started on the reformatting process – dismantling the digital frames, losing some, amalgamating others and sewing them

back together as multi-panel pages or spreads – when we and Tony started discussing the possibility of running Forged By Fire, in its original landscape format, in The Great Big Comic Scene Annual he was in the process of putting together. It seemed like a great showcase for the prequel, and once we'd sorted out the way it would work in terms of an otherwise 'portrait' format publication, it was all systems go. Forged By Fire appeared in the rear section of Annual and read inwards from the back cover, in a flip-book format.

SF: It was great to have Forged By Fire out there at last – and very much incentivised us in terms of the main (print) series. And now, with the print series set to debut, Forged By Fire is back in print again – this time as standalone one-shot.

CS: Will the prequel be generally available?

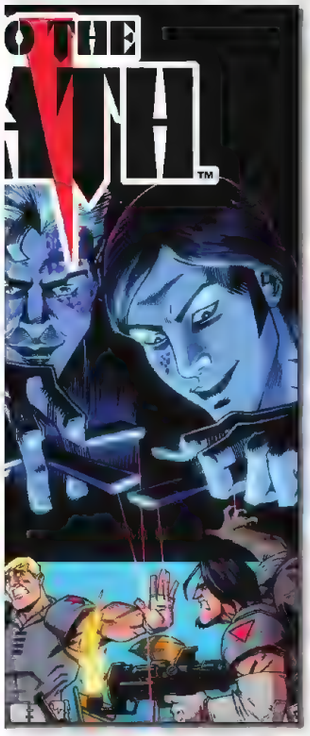
SF: At the moment, we're keeping it as something of an exclusive item – for subscribers to the whole series or direct to fans at signings and comic conventions. After that we'll see. You won't feel you've missed anything if you just read the main series, but like I say – Forged By Fire does contain original story and key background stuff that will, shall we say, enhance your enjoyment of the main series.

GS: Come along and see us at MCM London in May or London Film and Comicon in July and pick up a signed copy of Forged By Fire. You'll be glad you did!

CS: As succinctly as possible, how would you sum up the appeal of To The Death?

SF: Old-school. We've sidestepped the more modern approach to comics storytelling and gone for something more stripped down, back-to-basics and full on blood 'n' guts. It's first and foremost adrenaline-fuelled entertainment, a relentless onslaught populated with an eclectic mix of characters we hope will resonate with readers. To The Death will batter you senseless… in the good way.

GS: You get a lot of bang for your buck: 44 to 46 action-packed pages per issue, plus intrigue and dark secrets, doomed last stands and dramatic revelations. The pace never lets up, and it's gleefully, unashamedly violent and bloody. And then Killatoa comes into the mix, and we take it to a whole new level of carnage!



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THE CAST

ALEKSY DRYAGIN

JONAS HUEY

JOSIAH KRAKEN

LEONE

HASH FLYNN

MEGAN UMBER

DOLAN REKT

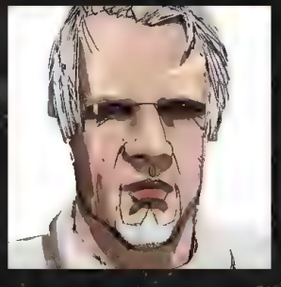
BETTE LARSSEN

DIAMOND BILL

VENI

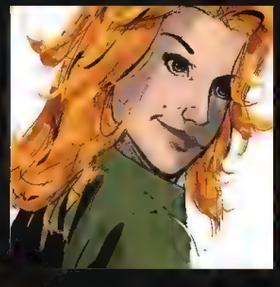
VIDI

VICI



DEACON SNOW

JUDDH KING



LENA DRYAGIN

LEO DRYAGIN

CORCORAN PRIME: THIRD PLANET OF THE SARRANI SYSTEM, 4.7 MILLION LIGHT YEARS FROM EARTH_ _
World War... a phrase that used to have gravitas, evoking a sense of mighty battles waged for the highest stakes.
Now... it's just another world, another war...

My name is Aleksy Dryagin and I'm a dead man walking.
WE'RE HUGGING GROUND HERE! WILL ONE OF YOU SMOKE THAT DAMN NEST!
We all are.

MY LEGENDARY SUNNY DISPOSITION IS TAKING SOME REAL HARD KNOCKS.
ROGER THAT...

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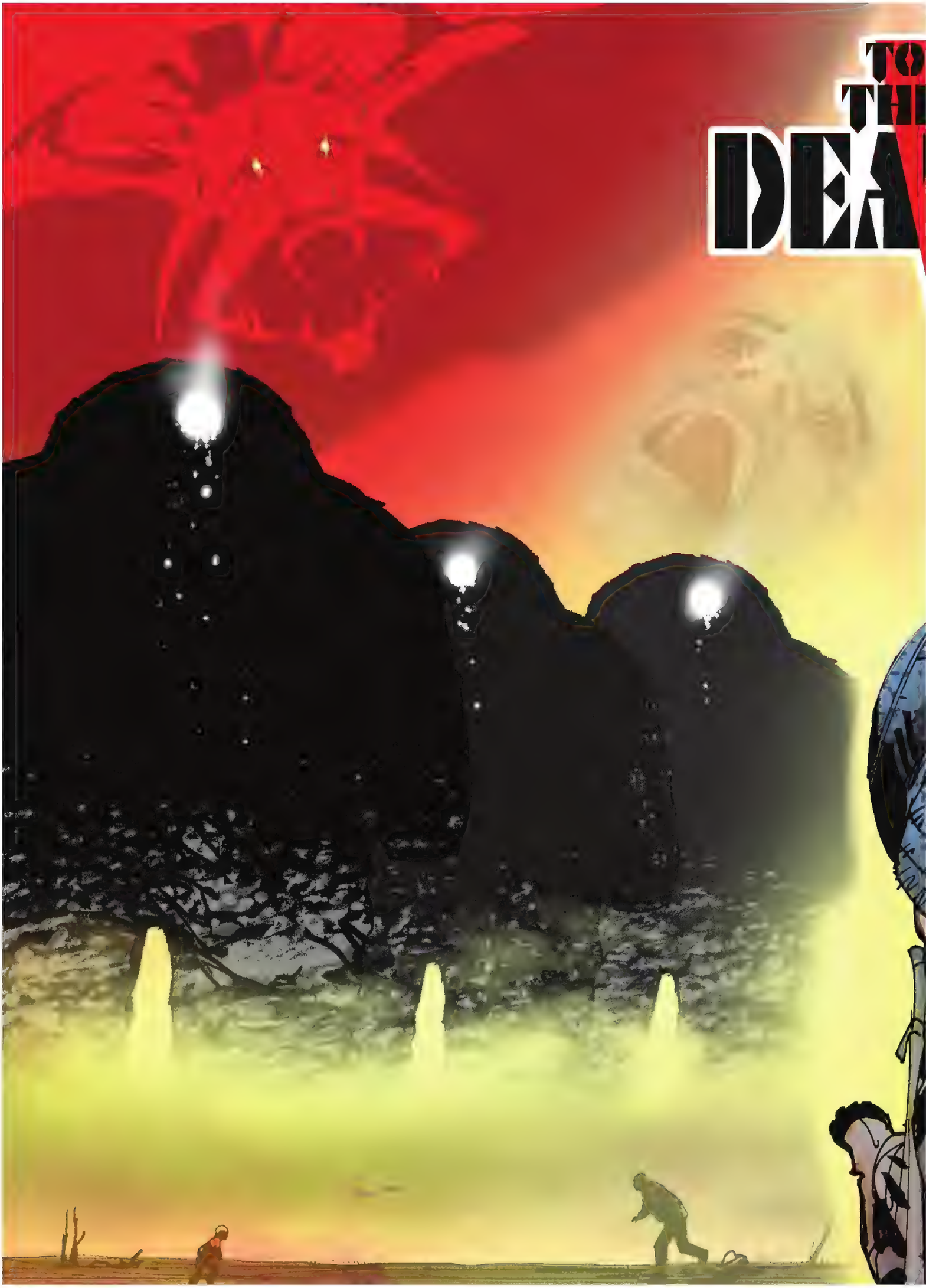

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FLYNN, KRAKEN-- LET'S GO!
CALL ME A COCKEYED OPTIMIST, BUT I FIGGER WE GOT 'EM ON THE RUN, CAP'N.
YEH, RIGHT. THINK THAT WAY...
NARY A BUG-EYED SLIMY SONNAVABITCH TO BE SEEN!
...YOU'LL THINK YOURSELF RIGHT INTO AN EARLY GRAVE.
KRAKEN'S RIGHT. STAY SHARP...
...STAY ALIVE.
HELL'S HAIRY TESTICLES! WHAT IS THIS SHIT?
The plain truth is, death is coming. The bitter end is all any of us have to look forward to.
INCOMING!
Hell, it's practically our rallying call, our battle cry...

...To The Death!

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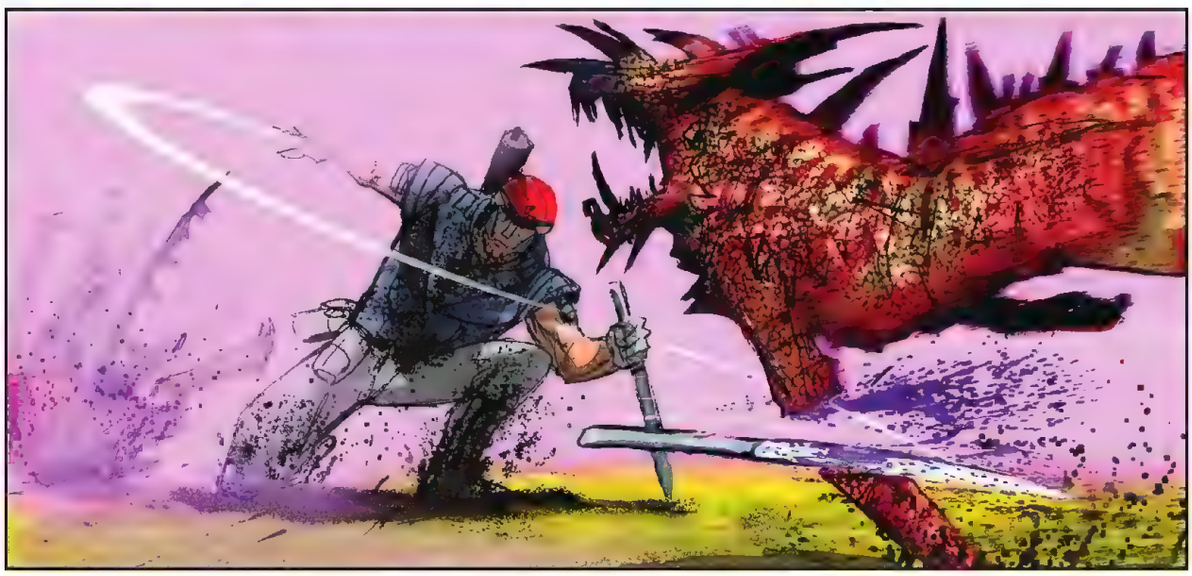

Just wish I could duck the bit that comes next... where all I have is questions. The sort no soldier worth his salt is supposed to ask.
About **what** we do and **why**, and **who** we're doing it to. And if what we do is justified, or right. They don't even dress it up in noble causes anymore. It's just... campaigns.
And instead of victory all I taste...

...Is ashes.

Leone... unlike Kraken... always has my back.
SURPRISE, SUCKER! OH, N-N-N-NO...
SSSSZZ

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Bringing self-publishing To the masses

Right now, the comics industry is crying out for new, innovative and exciting content – that's not just the umpteenth reboot of the same old set of characters and concepts. But getting creator-owned content to market can be fraught, stressful and expensive – and subject to the dictates and tastes and crowded schedules of a dozen or so 'power' companies. Comic Toolbox offers an alternative route for creators, one that takes the strain but has zero impact on either the core creativity or the IP itself.

There is a plethora of talented creators quietly developing content, and successfully crowdfunding print runs to release themselves. There are great designers, slick printing outfits. But it's a massive task bringing it all together, getting to market, getting the books seen by a larger audience. There are hundreds of hard-working, passionate comic shops, reacting to industry trends and desperately trying to forecast readers purchasing habits. This is where Comic Toolbox hope they can help.

Comic Toolbox believes they are able to support the independent creators, local comic shops and publishers, injecting a new vigour into the industry, helping the industry as a whole, getting books out to a wider audience that might normally only be seen at conventions and getting great new creators and ideas in front of readers that wouldn't ever be aware of them. While simultaneously assisting retail store owners with ordering and data regarding their customers' habits.

The team behind Comic Toolbox have a combined 25 years in the comic retail industry with 40 years in technology and Internet application development. Their story started with some naïve retailers in the 1990s, redundancy, a partnership and a rollercoaster ride of over 10 years providing comics to Guildford and surrounding areas. They weathered the turbulent years that saw the rise of Image and others, the Death of Superman, the Comic Book Crash, the birth of variant covers, the industry changing alterations to the Direct Market, Y2K and even worse, Brittney Spears, The Spice Girls, NSYNC and the Backstreet Boys.

They have applied this unique expertise and built a suite of tools to support aspects of the comics industry, starting with a subscription service, supplying US import and UK comics to online customers for the last 3 years via GetMyComics.com. Having previously run their own stores (Avatar Comics, Guildford Games and Comics), they understand the importance of the bricks and mortar stores - "comic stores are fundamental to the industry" says founder, Adrian Clarke, "not just as a place to pick up books, but as a second home. But they don't have much help, and it's obviously hard work surviving on the high street right now"

With that in mind, they have opened up their ordering and data management solution to physical stores – allowing shops to take advantage of all the subscription management facilities the portal provides and offer them to their own customers. Even more importantly, their next offering provides a new sales channel for self-published works.

ComicScene: How did Comic Toolbox come about?

Adrian Clarke: Applying the knowledge gained from that technological background, we felt we could improve things in the comic market. I used to love helping out at my brother's comic shop, but I slowly drifted towards a technology job. I never lost the desire to do something again for comics – especially when the store sadly closed down. I'd had so many ideas how to improve things for the store, and then that grew into something I could run part time. Using the experience from my years in IT, I finally got together with some friends to start building the systems.

Starting with a game changing comics subscription service that really provides the customer with the information they need to find the titles they want to. The service allows readers to follow their favourite titles and creators, and not miss out on crossover storylines – we constantly analyse and enhance data provided in the industry to give readers the best information we can.

CS: And what made you expand from just that service?

AC: We know that the cornerstone to the comics market is the local comic shop, and we want to give them more support. We have applied the learnings of the subscription site to build a system that increases the visibility of stock to store owners and their customers, giving the retailer the data they need to accurately order the titles they need – quickly – and providing a much-needed upturn in profit.

CS: And how did you get involved in the publishing and distribution.

Dave Clarke: To be completely accurate, we are more of a facilitator for the whole industry. We want to assist connecting the creators to their readers and future audience. There are some very depressing statistics around self-publishing, if a creator sells $1000 of a their title through normal methods, they actually lose something in the region of $200, so it's understandable that people concentrate on small self-published runs – but we can balance that equation much more fairly, with less risk for all parties.

AC: This came out of a desire to bring Simon Furman and Geoff Senior's To The Death to print, and supporting the UK's most recent and thriving comics magazine – ComicScene! I've been a lifelong fan of Simon and Geoff's work – I read comics from as early as I can remember, but the most vivid memories are early Marvel UK Transformers, particularly the stories by that team. I thoroughly enjoyed the web series of To The Death, but like many others, wanted to see it in a physical form! Like vinyl in the music industry, for some people, there is no substitute for the physical medium.

DC: From those early discussions, we formulated a really ground-breaking new service. To facilitate the production and distribution of this criminally untapped vein of talent in creator owned and independently published titles. There is so much impressive material that is currently not seen by potential readers, that can appeal to a much wider demographic. Integrating our systems, we are opening up this material to as many readers as possible and reducing the risk involved in self-publishing.

Greg Beagle: Titles that would not normally be seen other than on a crowdfunding site, or at conventions, can now be listed with us at Get My Comics, which means that they are also seen and ordered by customers at all of the local shops that subscribe to our service. This takes away the risk for shop owners who'd normally be averse to 'taking a punt' at stocking something unknown, no matter how good it is. It gives the creators an exact amount of sales. All this before handing over to a partner print company (or printing themselves). Of course, pre-sales mean that the expenditure is already covered. It really is a perfect solution for all involved, minimum risk with a decent level of profit for all parties and a vastly increased range of titles for consumers.

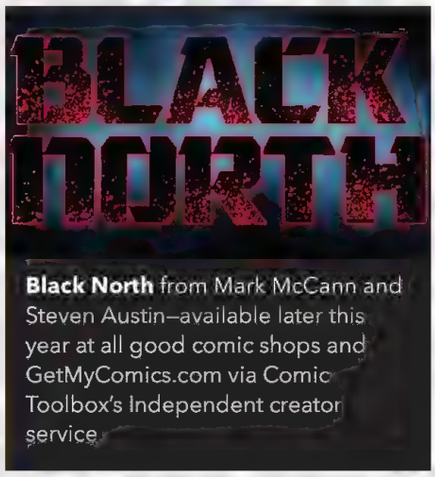
CS: Any more tools in the box?

DC: We have a lot more underway – we're constantly considering worthwhile additions to each system, and have an appetite to keep bringing new systems to all parts of the market and grow this great industry.

AC: The developers are never short of work – we always have new ideas, and most seem to get traction, which is awesome.

Comic Toolbox and Forged By Fire release To The Death at MCM in London May 24th to 26th ahead of the official release June 19th.

Creators and self publishers – please get in touch to discuss getting your titles listed on GetMyComics.com and at shops round the country, they'd love to hear from you! Retailers can find out more about the services too - visit comictoolbox.com and drop them a line at info@comictoolbox.com.



Black North from Mark McCann and Steven Austin—available later this year at all good comic shops and GetMyComics.com via Comic Toolbox's Independent creator service.

ONCE WOLFRAM SEES THAT THE PILOT'S ATTENTION HAS BEEN DRAWN BY MY FIRE --
-- HE SHOU--?
THPP
WHERE ARE THESE BULLETS COMING FROM?!
THP
THPP

International Aces by Chris Geary

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OUR LAND PART 3 - Continued from ComicScene Issue 3

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THUD
DENA?
W-WHAT HAPPENED?
WE NEED TO GET YOU TO A HOSPITAL.
I'M FINE. I FEEL... I FEEL GOOD.
BULLSHIT. YOU'RE IN SHOCK.
GUESS WE WEREN'T THE ONLY ONES WHO SAW THAT THING GO DOWN.
LOOKS LIKE THEY SENT THE WHOLE CAVALRY.
WHAT DO YOU THINK IT...
WHAT THE...?
I WAS JUST...
I WAS THINKING ABOUT SAND...
JUST THINKING ABOUT IT!

STOP THE TRUCK
I SAID PULL OVER!
DENA? WHERE ARE YOU?
DENA! COME BACK!
THIS IS A BAD IDEA!

HOW 'BOUT YOU, CARL? HAYWORTH OR BACALL?
ONE THAT GETS ME HARD'S BETTY GRABLE. BOY, I'D GIVE MA RIGHT ARM TO CLIMB THOSE LEGS AND UP ON INTA THAT COFFEE GRINDER!
HAW! IF THE LEGS ARE WORTH A MILLION BUCKS JUST THINK WHAT'S AT THE TOP OF 'EM!
GET UP.
I'LL BE DAMNED.
YOU GOT SOME BIG RED INJUN BALLS ON YA, CHIEF, I'LL GIVE YA THAT. COME TO GET YOUR LIL' FAGGOT BUTT KICKED AGAIN?
NAH, I THOUGHT MAYBE WE'D TRY IT MY WAY THIS TIME.
CRACK

...To Be Continued

Keith Richardson

Part Two

'New material is of vital importance. You present something as polished and **fresh and contemporary** as you possibly can and other people **sit up and take notice**'

Keith Richardson is the Senior Editor at Rebellion responsible for graphic novels and The Treasury of British Comics. In part one of this interview with Richardson, we talked of Free Comic Book Day, all-ages comics, the 2000AD Villains Takeover Special, and Roy of the Rovers. Here, in part two, we concentrate on the vast archive of material Rebellion have access to for The Treasury of British Comics and the all-new material of The Vigilant and the Cor! & Buster Special.

If you're a fan of British comics, you'll most likely have already heard all about The Treasury of British Comics. It's Rebellion's publishing division that deals with the vast number of comic properties from the long and diverse history of British comics they've acquired over the last few years. This includes characters and comics as varied and unique as Battle, Lion, Misty, Roy Of The Rovers, Buster, Whizzer & Chips, Cor!, Tammy, Jinty, and Tales From The Trigon Empire.

Since taking on the role as head of the Treasury, Richardson's published a number of highly regarded books of classic material, including Faceache, Fran of the Floods, Ken Reid's Creepy Creations, The Thirteenth Floor, Bella at the Bar, The Leopard From Lime Street, and Marney The Fox. But, there's so much more to come, and Richardson's incredibly excited about the future, "We've got a lot of material, a lot of incredible material, and a lot of material that should get people really excited".

The plan for the Treasury, according to Richardson, is simple, "The plan is to keep going, it's balancing it between stuff we think will go quite well, that a lot of people want and expect, such as The Spider. And then there's the stuff that really deserves to see the light of day that people might not have even heard of before, strips that are really beautiful, that deserve to see the light of day again".

As an example, Richardson talks about his most recent find, "I was looking at a strip, the other day, from Tiger, from the mid 60s, which is a story about a robot in the Wild West, with the ominous title of Helmethead. The story is quite bizarre, but the artwork is, absolutely, gorgeous. That's the kind of strip I feel should be out there, people should know about this, because this is great".

You do, really, get the impression, when talking to Richardson, that he goes into work looking forward to what he might come across, whether that's some incredible unknown funny strip or something from the huge number of girls' comics in the archive. "There's some really great material in those girls' comics. The line work surpasses almost anything else, great art. And some great stories in there as well, some of the stories are wonderfully engaging. Concrete Surfers is one I've come across recently, which we really have to collect up. The line work on it is astonishing and it's a great yarn as well".

Once the material was acquired, the real work started for Richardson and his team at the Treasury, "We have

a lot of original art, but, unfortunately, past publishers tended not to view the art as such, and all those horror stories, of art being used to block holes in walls, mop up water, used as part of a cutting board, means a lot of the original art is just gone. It's such a massive undertaking". As Richardson says, most of the archive is an, almost, complete set of the comics, which need, as you can imagine, a lot of work to make ready for reprinting. "We've got some of the most up-to-date scanning equipment available, so we can do almost near perfect scans now. Plus, we have a great reprographics team, led by a chap called Joe Morgan, who works wonders on this kind of stuff".

But, even with the work in house, scanned, ready for print, things aren't over, "The hardest part of this job is getting the credits right. When it comes to artists, it's not so much of a problem. When it comes to writers, it's an absolute nightmare. I'm trying my best, but it is really difficult. When we inherited the archive I was hoping we'd inherit some form of ledgers as well, to assist in finding out who's written what. But, that wasn't the case, unfortunately". Richardson's had to turn into something of a sleuth, "It's about getting recognition for creators who have disappeared into obscurity and also that their families get a few royalties, recognition for the great work that they've done".

Richardson, to his credit, tells us of the lengths he has to go to and his frustration at, sometimes, not being able to identify the creators involved, "Nine out of ten times we get it right, but there's been the odd occasion where we've just had to give up, having exhausted every avenue. Case in point would be the recent Misty collection, Wolf Girl, where there were a couple of writers on there who we just couldn't identify and we just had to go with the unknown tag, which is horrible and something I hate doing but sometimes there simply isn't a choice".

"New material is of vital importance. You present something as polished and fresh and contemporary as you possibly can and other people sit up and take notice"

As passionate as Richardson is about the Treasury and the older material he's responsible for, he's just as passionate about presenting the characters held in the archive in new, fresh, and innovative ways, all to attract new readers to the medium.

The first indication of this was in 2018, when Rebellion announced The Vigilant, a superhero team composed of some classic, and very British, heroes. The 48-page Vigilant Special, with a main story by Simon Furman and Simon Coleby debuted to mostly positive reviews and feedback, although, as Richardson admits, the project had a somewhat troubled genesis, "The Vigilant was always intended to be a 3-part series and it ended up being one 48-page comic. We didn't have much time to get it all put together and what Simon Furman and Simon Coleby achieved was phenomenal. It might have been a bit dense or there might have been slight confusion with certain bits, but there will be more, and in the long run, it will pay dividends". Yes, there are plans to continue The Vigilant, with Richardson telling us that the team will return in 2019.

The other new project that Richardson's very excited about is the Cor! & Buster Special, published in April, a comic of all-new material featuring characters from the pages of Buster, Cor!, Monster Fun, Wham!, and Jackpot. Richardson explains, "We didn't only acquire the vast archive of back catalogue material to put out reprints. We've got characters that, I think, as long as the core idea remains intact, you can do new, exciting things with".

Inside, there are classic characters including Sweeny Toddler, Frankie Stein, Deadly Hedley, Tony Broke and Ivor Lott, Faceache, Kid Kong, and Buster. And drawing these classics, you'll see the likes of Steve Mannion, Lew Stringer, Abigail Bulmer, Neil Googe, Ned Hartley, Cavan Scott, Tanya Roberts, Nigel Paterson, and Pye Parr creating the strips, a great mix of artists, something Richardson definitely wanted, "It definitely doesn't look all the same, and nor should it. Diversity is the key, getting as many styles in as possible. Tonally, I didn't want it to be too sanitised or too safe, you can go out there a little bit. I wanted to reach into that Ken Reid spirit, so it can be naughty, can be a little bit risqué, but never crossing the line, maybe straddling it occasionally though!"

It's got to be a little bit anarchic, a little bit silly, that's what appeals, and rightly so. That's what the comics of yesteryear did and that's what we want to bring back.

As for the future, Richardson has grand plans for the humour comics following the Cor! & Buster Special, but he's, understandably, cautious, "I'd love to do more, but it's baby steps at the moment. But, I would love to see more going forward. It's something, I think, we should, certainly, be doing".

One thing's for sure, after talking to Richardson, I'm absolutely convinced that the long and rich history of British comics is in safe hands. As he says, "At the end of the day, Rebellion are a business, but we see ourselves as curators as well. And we're committed to preserving this material, getting this material, that hasn't seen the light of day for decades, out to readers, new and old".

We look forward to seeing just what comes next, from Rebellion, from 2000AD, from The Treasury of British Comics, for readers who loved the comics and characters the first time round, and for a new generation of readers. The past, and the future, seems to be in good hands.

Author: Richard Bruton | **Twitter:** @richardbruton

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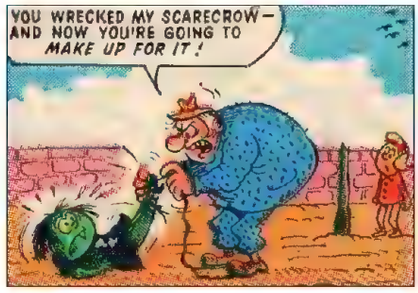
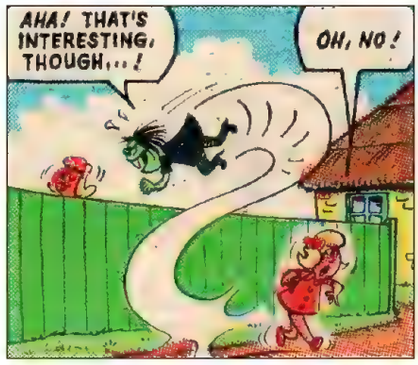
DRACULASS DAUGHTER OF DRACULA





Draculass – Daughter of Dracula, premiered in the first issue of IPC's MONSTER FUN COMIC cover-dated 14th June 1975. She came to England from Transylvania to stay with her relatives – Aunt, Uncle and cousin Maisie, all of them perfectly normal people. Draculass was a no-joke vampire - green-faced and sharp-fanged, she fed on human blood and was always on the lookout for unsuspecting folks to prang. Luckily for the victims, Draculass' bite wasn't lethal and didn't turn them into vampires - all they needed was a cross-patch of sticking plaster on the neck. Nonetheless, the little vampire's urges didn't make her very popular amongst townsfolk, and Maisie was her only friend - possibly because they had an arrangement that Draculass won't try to prang her cousin. Her fangs always at the ready, every week Draculass schemed to take a bite at a nice neck or two. Needless to say, her plots usually backfired.

Draculass was illustrated by Terry Bave who devoted a couple of passages to the strip in his book CARTOONS AND COMIC STRIPS BY TERRY BAVE. The artist recalls he created the character together with his wife Sheila when they had been invited to contribute to the new comic by way of creating a suitable 'monster' feature. Initially they thought of Draculadd but then Shiela suggested that a little vampire lass might prove more fun, and by replacing the two D's with a couple of S's they arrived at Draculass. Mr. Bave recalled that Draculass proved very popular with MFC readers and even attracted her very own brand of fain mail, "with many a reader (especially girls) exclaiming their sheer delight over the little vampire's fangs".

Draculass continued throughout the brief 73-issue run of Monster Fun without missing a week. The little vampire even got her own poster in issue 22 and a cut-out mask in issue No. 34. The strip survived merger with BUSTER and continued there for a few months until 5th March 1977.

GUMS

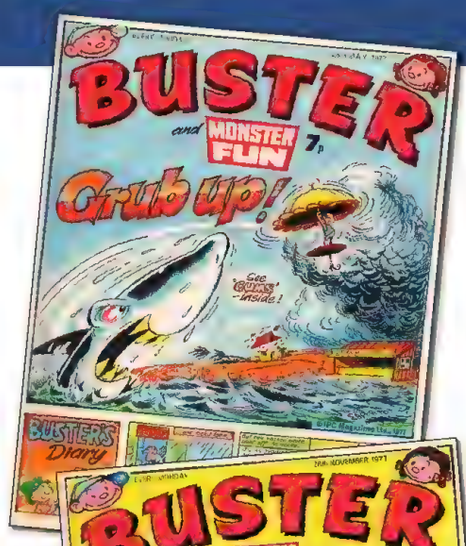
A SHARK WORSE THAN ITS BITE!

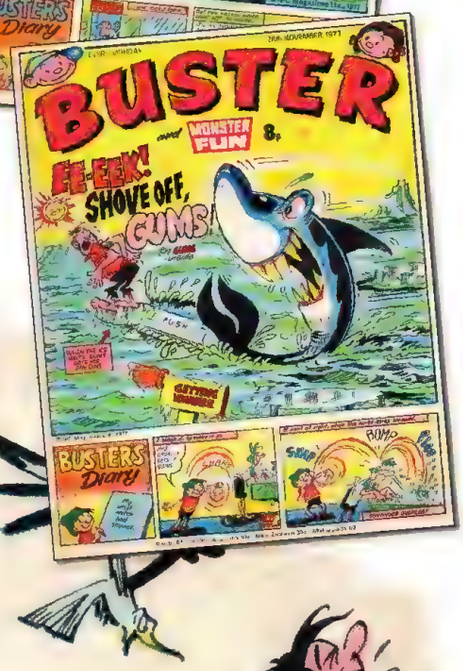
Gums first appeared in MONSTER FUN COMIC No. 35 cover-dated 7th February, 1976. It was a clever and funny tie-in with JAWS - the blockbuster Hollywood movie released in 1975. The connection was emphasised in the logo of the strip which mimicked the famous movie poster.

The scene was set on the sunny coast of Australia. The strip was about a toothless shark with a set of false choppers, and the young Bluey who lived in the coastal town which the beast chose to terrorize. The shark was a dangerous and aggressive predator. The only way to render him harmless was by removing his false teeth - the mission which Bluey took upon himself. Such was the basic premise of this highly successful and long-running IPC strip which survived the incorporation of MONSTER FUN COMIC into BUSTER in October 1976, and continued there until 12th May 1984.

Bluey prevailed in the majority of the episodes but sometimes the shark got the upper hand. The early stories were sometimes serialized and spanned a period of two weeks: in the first week Gums usually lost his choppers, and then won them back a week later, thanks to his cunning and smartness, if not through sheer luck or coincidence.

Initially the illustrator was Robert Nixon who designed Gums to the idea suggested by the editor of MONSTER FUN COMIC. Alf Saporito took over from him on a permanent basis starting from MONSTER FUN COMIC issue 52 and remained in charge of the strip for the rest of the seventies and during the early eighties when he was succeeded by John Geering.





Author: Irmantas Povilaika | **Website:** kazoop.blogspot.co.uk

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Welcome to the latest Tripwire Presents TV and Film section of Comic Scene UK. Each issue we shall be offering the best in TV and film coverage in the pages of the magazine. This time around, it starts with a look at X-Men: Dark Phoenix, out in cinemas this June...

Dark Times Are Ahead

June sees the release of Fox's X-Men: Dark Phoenix, which adapts what is arguably the best-loved X-Men comic story of all time. But with Disney's takeover of Fox, what does this mean for future mutant movies? JOEL MEADOWS takes a look at the film's genesis and tries to make a few predictions about what we could see next...

This year has been a decent one for actress Sophie Turner so far. The final season of *Game of Thrones* kicked off with her reprising her role as Sansa Stark one more time. In June, we have the latest Fox X-Men movie out too, Dark Phoenix, with Turner returning to play Jean Grey/Phoenix. It is no exaggeration to say that The Dark Phoenix Saga which ran in Uncanny X-Men #129-138 is still many people's favourite X-Men saga ever published. So no pressure then.

X-Men: Dark Phoenix has had a rather chequered history as a film, being shifted back in the schedules a number of times. The previous X-Men film, *Apocalypse*, was released in 2016 and grossed a disappointing $543m. When you compare this to the Marvel Studios productions like *Black Panther*, *Avengers: Infinity War* and even this year's *Captain Marvel*, they all broke the $1bn mark at the box office.

> "2019 saw the Disney takeover of Fox approved and so it is very likely that, just like Spider-man, the X-Men characters will be absorbed back into the Marvel Studios movies. So this could be the last time we see James McAvoy, Michael Fassbender, Sophie Turner and the rest in these roles."

Another event has cast a big shadow over this film too. 2019 saw the Disney takeover of Fox approved and so it is very likely that, just like Spider-man, the X-Men characters will be absorbed back into the Marvel Studios movies. So this could be the last time we see James McAvoy, Michael Fassbender, Sophie Turner and the rest in these roles.

Here's Fox's official synopsis for the film: In Dark Phoenix, the X-Men face their most formidable and powerful foe: one of their own, Jean Grey. During a rescue mission in space, Jean is nearly killed when she is hit by a mysterious

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Phoenix Rising: Jessica Chastain, who plays an unnamed villain, with Jean Grey/ Phoenix (Sophie Turner)

cosmic force. Once she returns home, this force not only makes her infinitely more powerful, but far more unstable. Wrestling with this entity inside her, Jean unleashes her powers in ways she can neither comprehend nor contain. With Jean spiralling out of control, and hurting the ones she loves most, she begins to unravel the very fabric that holds the X-Men together. Now, with this family falling apart, they must find a way to unite — not only to save Jean's soul, but to save our very planet from aliens who wish to weaponise this force and rule the galaxy.

X-Men: Dark Phoenix stars James McAvoy, Michael Fassbender, Jennifer Lawrence, Nicholas Hoult, Sophie Turner, Tye Sheridan, Alexandra Shipp and Jessica Chastain. Direction comes from Simon Kinberg.

Because this is the end of the current iteration of the team, director Kinberg is prepared to take more chances. He explained in an interview with *Entertainment Weekly* last year that not all of the main characters would survive:

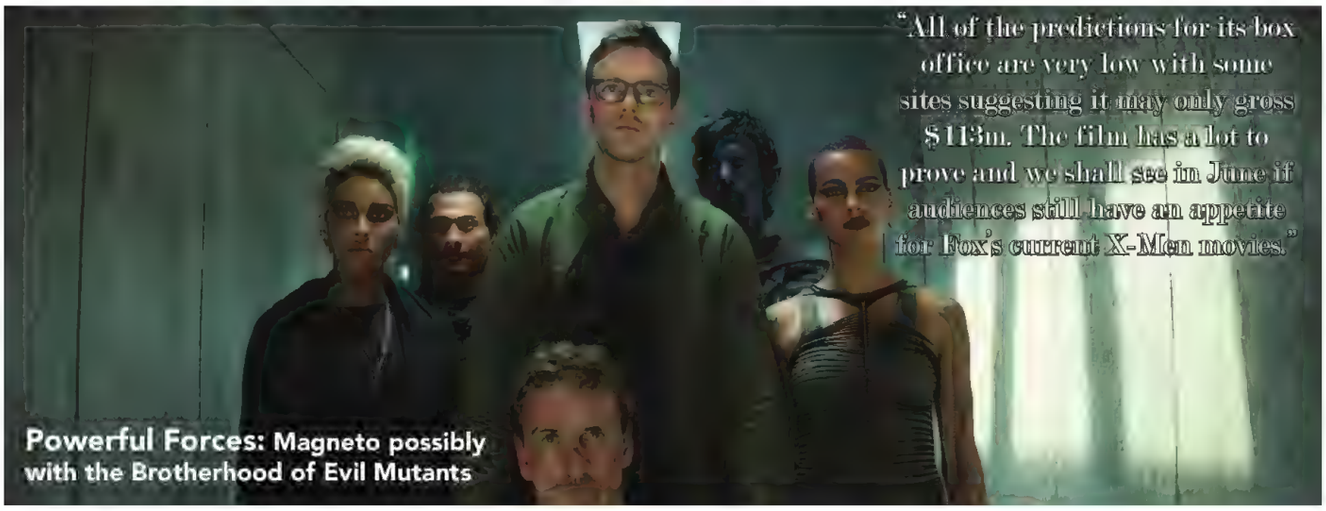
"Mystique is someone who in our universe has been part of the X-Men and has been part of Magneto's world. Her death impacts literally everybody. "The thought process behind [killing Mystique] was to primarily show that this is a movie that is unlike other X-Men movies," Kinberg continued. "It's a movie where shocking things happen, where intense, dramatic things happen. People don't just fall off buildings and dust themselves off and walk away. There's a reality to this movie and a consequence to this movie. Even more than that, it was to show that Jean/Dark Phoenix is genuinely a threat to everyone, including the X-Men."

Kinberg was shooting this before the Disney/ Fox merger but he did approach it as if it was the end of an era for these characters and the actors playing them, he explained in the same interview for EW last year.

"What's interesting is obviously I started this movie long before Disney purchased Fox, and I approached the movie knowing that it was the fourth movie with our First Class cast and that the Phoenix story for me is the ultimate X-Men story," Kinberg explained. "I approached the movie like it was the culmination in some ways—not that there couldn't be other movies, but I did approach the movie as if, like, if you spent 20 years of living with this family, this is the movie you see the family truly tested, fall apart, and hopefully come back together. There was something about that sense of closure for the family, that sense of test, that sense of loss. It felt like not this is the end necessarily, but this is it for them. It is the climax of this franchise."

All of the predictions for its box office are very low with some sites suggesting it may only gross $113m. The film has a lot to prove and we shall see in June if audiences still have an appetite for Fox's current X-Men movies.

"All of the predictions for its box office are very low with some sites suggesting it may only gross $113m. The film has a lot to prove and we shall see in June if audiences still have an appetite for Fox's current X-Men movies."



Powerful Forces: Magneto possibly with the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants

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ON THE SIDE OF THE ANGELS?

Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* is currently running its second season on Starz in the US and on Amazon Prime in the UK. Another Gaiman-related project, *Good Omens*, based on the novel by him and the late Sir Terry Pratchett, is an Amazon Prime BBC co-production coming to Amazon this May and the BBC a little later on. JOEL MEADOWS took a look at its genesis and development

Neil Gaiman is a writer whose work straddles both comics and novels. Now he has added showrunning to his CV. As well as adapting *American Gods*, his novel, he has been the showrunner on Amazon-BBC co-production on *Good Omens*, which adapts the novel he wrote with the late Sir Terry Pratchett into a six part series. When Pratchett died in 2015, it did put Gaiman in a slightly difficult position in terms of continuing with the adaptation but he continued regardless as he told The Verge in an interview at New York Comic Con last October:"I came back from his funeral and started writing the first episode of *Good Omens*...and tried to convince myself that it was funny."

For Gaiman, he had a very specific audience in mind when he was adapting his and Sir Terry's work for TV, he pointed out in the same chat with The Verge: "When you write a book or TV show, you have an imaginary audience in your head... When I wrote my bits of *Good Omens*, the novel, I was writing them for a very specific audience: Terry Pratchett. That was my standard [for the series, as well]."

> "WHEN THE BOOK WAS WRITTEN, THE ONLY WORRY TERRY AND I HAD WAS THAT WE WERE IN THIS MAGICAL WORLD OF 1990, WHEN HISTORY WAS OVER AND EVERYTHING SEEMED AT PEACE...THE IDEA OF ARMAGEDDON SEEMED FURTHER AWAY THAN EVER. NOW GLOBAL IDIOCY IS AT AN ALL TIME HIGH." –NEIL GAIMAN

It is essential to stay true to the spirit of the source material but David Tennant, who plays demon Crowley, felt that you had to make something that was unique to the TV adaptation, he pointed out in the same interview with The Verge from last October in New York:

"I think once we started shooting, I put the book down, actually...In a way, it then becomes its own beast, and you're playing each scene as it comes up. There has to come a point where you have to go 'Well, now it's this, we've made a decision, and that's the story we're telling."

The plot of *Good Omens* is classic Gaiman material: It is set in 2018 as humanity prepares for an imminent apocalypse – but an angel (Michael Sheen) and a demon (David Tennant) team up in order to try and sabotage the end of the world.

The book was originally published back in 1990 but for Gaiman, bringing out the TV adaptation in 2019 makes it feel even more relevant than when the book came out originally, he told the *i* newspaper in an interview this year.

"When the book was written, the only worry Terry and I had was that we were in this sudden new-found Glasnost-y magical world of 1990, when history was over and everything seemed at peace...

The idea of Armageddon seemed further away than ever. Right now the nuclear clock is ticking, closer and

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closer to midnight…Now international terrorism is at an all-time high and so is polarisation… Global idiocy is at an all time high, which makes it incredibly appropriate – we're suddenly timely."

At first glance, it does look a bit like a book that would be very hard to bring to TV but this was a challenge that Gaiman relished, he admitted in an interview in *Drama Quarterly* earlier this year.

"It seemed like an unfilmable adaptation but this didn't worry Gaiman: "I feel a little bit like one of those people who manages to do something completely impossible because nobody mentions to me that it's impossible. I should have had a clue in retrospect, because we went to half-a-dozen of the best writers in the world over a period of a few years and asked them to do the adaptation of *Good Omens* and they all explained that it was probably impossible to do. But then Terry asked me if I would do the adaptation. Up until that point, the deal Terry and I had was that we would do something together on *Good Omens* or not do it at all. Here we were with Terry actually saying, 'I can't do it so you have to because I want to see it before I die.' Then he died – which left me with *Good Omens* as a thing to see through, and I couldn't let myself believe at that point that it would be impossible or unfilmable because I had to give this to Terry."

The show's director Douglas Mackinnon echoed this a little in the same chat with *Drama Quarterly*.

"When people are making films, there's a lot of time spent worrying about things like tone and consistency and telling one story clearly, whereas what *Good Omens* does is tell multiple stories with multiple characters, albeit with Aziraphale and Crowley at the heart of it all. It wanders off into many different paths and thoroughfares, and yet the main theme – good against evil – glues it together. When I read the script, I felt it wasn't impossible, just quite a big challenge."

Gaiman actually managed to introduce characters who weren't in the book, he revealed to *Drama Quarterly* in the same interview earlier this year.

"The angels were characters Terry and I had talked about, planned out and thought about a lot after we wrote the book – and had we ever done a sequel, they would have been in that more," Gaiman says. "So I got to go and steal from the work we did back then and create four angels who aren't anywhere in the book: Gabriel, played by Jon [Hamm]; Michael, played by Doon Mackichan; Paul Chahidi plays Sandalphon and Gloria Obianyo plays Uriel, and they're wonderful – these incredible angels in very sharp suits."

Gaiman was showrunner on the series but this was pretty tough and demanding for him, he admitted to DQ.

"I'm very much looking forward to becoming a retired showrunner," he quips, revealing his ambitions to create and write more television, novels, children's books and poetry. …By the time this goes out, I will have given four years of my life to it and there are lots of other things out there that I want to do. I've learned so much from Douglas and from working with everybody about the minutiae of making a show like this."

It was an experience that he found very satisfying:

"I think I will be much more useful in the future, as I will be able to create things and communicate to showrunners much more successfully."

There is a lot of genre material on TV and film these days but the omens are good that *Good Omens* will be well-received.

Good Omens starts on Amazon Prime on 31 May and six months later on the BBC in the UK.

Unlikely alliance: angel Aziraphale (Sheen) plots with devil Crowley (Tennant)

"WHEN PEOPLE ARE MAKING FILMS, THERE'S A LOT OF TIME SPENT WORRYING ABOUT THINGS LIKE TONE AND CONSISTENCY AND TELLING ONE STORY CLEARLY, WHEREAS WHAT GOOD OMENS DOES IS TELL MULTIPLE STORIES WITH MULTIPLE CHARACTERS." – DOUGLAS MACKINNON

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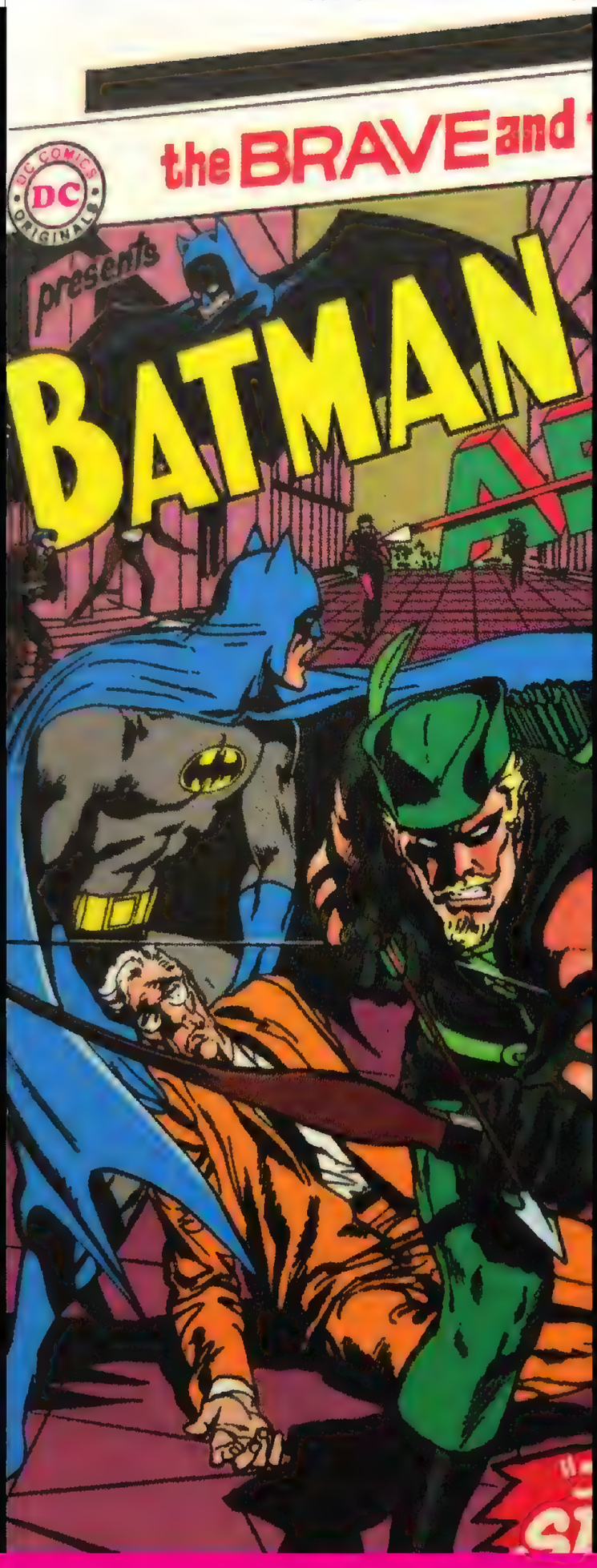
BATMAN IN THE 1960's

For Batman, the 1960s was a decade of churn. New directions were regularly adopted by publishers DC Comics before having to be abandoned due to commercial exigencies, some totally unexpected. In that one ten-year period, the Caped Crusader lurched between ridiculous and sublime – and the brutal fact is that it was at his most absurd that he achieved the greatest success.

The Batman character proceeded in the first half of the Sixties pretty much as it had in the second half of the 1950s. From approximately the dawn of rock 'n' roll to roughly the Beatles' first appearance on The Ed Sullivan Show, Batman was as unhip and cheesy as Pat Boone. The Batman Universe was increasingly and incongruously science-fiction oriented. It was also populated by an ever-expanding Batman family that included Ace the Bat-Hound, Batwoman (not to be confused with Bat-Girl), Bat-Girl (a child character not be confused with the later, adult and unhyphenated, Batgirl) and Bat-Mite (an imp Batman devotee not to be confused with anything less than risible). The writers devised stories that lived down to this freakshow via the likes of robots, space creatures and mad scientists. Batman himself often wasn't Batman but was forced to undergo the indignity of metamorphoses, transformed via villainy or accident into such things as a skyscraper-sized giant, an antennae-headed green alien and Bat-Baby.



These days, such Silver Age zaniness is precisely what motivates adults to salivatingly compile wants lists for the period, but at the time even young readers were clearly sufficiently sophisticated to understand that novelty should not be commonplace. When in 1964 DC appointed Julius Schwartz editor of its Batman line it was with the specific purpose of arresting a steep decline in sales.

"Introducing a 'new look' Batman and Robin" declared the front cover of Detective Comics #327, cover-dated May 1964. The hero appeared sleek and fresh, symbolised by the yellow oval now resident behind the bat symbol on his chest. Robin, meanwhile, was suddenly no longer a dutiful boy but a teenager, with all the chippiness that implied. Batman himself now had an edge fitting his life-mission of avenging the slaying of his parents: at one point in the story, he threatened a villain with his own confiscated gun.

The following month's Batman (#164) saw the unveiling of a new set of wheels. "The original Batmobile has had its day," Bruce Wayne explained to Dick Grayson. "The trend now is toward sports cars – small, manoeuvrable jobs." The same comic saw a new-look, high-tech Batcave and the introduction of a hotline to Commissioner Gordon. More changes were being rung in over in Detective Comics the same month. Alfred was killed off and replaced by Dick's Aunt Harriet, a sop to those who had long complained about the alleged homosexual undertones to a domestic set-up involving no females. Schwartz had to reverse the butler's demise when told that a forthcoming Batman TV series would feature the character, but other modifications took. The members of the bat family were treated like most embarrassing relatives are by never being mentioned, science fiction stories were banned and a semblance of noir was engendered by setting stories wherever practical at night. Batman's visuals became largely the preserve of Carmine Infantino. Although Batman's rinky-dink ears and the cast's toothpaste smiles now appear slightly antediluvian, the artist also brought a musculature and realism to the character that then seemed very modern.

And then it was all undone. The villain who tore asunder Schwartz's well-laid plans was not the Joker, the Riddler or Catwoman, but the aforementioned ABC television series. The Batman show that ran between January 1966 and March 1968 was in large part a spoof of the 1943 Batman serial starring Lewis Wilson, particularly its contrived cliff-hangers and foghorn-voiced narration. Overlaid on that was Adam West's deadpan portrayal of Batman as the only man in the world who didn't know how ridiculous he was, the exclamatory dialogue of Burt Ward's Robin, wholly unnecessary but utterly insistent sound-effect title cards, and a succession of cameos by famous faces who opened windows on the patently horizontal buildings the 'Dynamic Duo' were arduously scaling.

It was a genuinely good show, the pre-Schwartz Silver Age Batman comics brought to life but deploying a comedic approach that those publications hadn't possessed even though it was the only one appropriate to such wacko fare. Youngsters, though, didn't get the joke. Older kids thought it was a typically clueless adults' perspective on comics characters. Younger kids were entranced by the colour (it was one of the first programmes not shot in monochrome), the deus-ex-machina gadgets Batman pulled from his utility belt, the undeniably cool Batmobile and the Neal Hefti theme music (stirringly driving at start and end, dizzily

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swirling during transitions). When the show became a ratings smash, it meant that it became by default the only version of Batman that the majority of the populace knew. Schwartz and his colleagues felt obliged, therefore, to abandon the modernisation agenda and adopt the show's campy tone. Schwartz's feelings must have been mixed, to say the least, as Batman comic sales proceeded to double.

For those who measured success by metrics other than commerce, the Batman series was a disaster for both comics in general and DC in particular. The 'Marvel Age of Comics' was only just beginning to confer respectability on the picture-story medium. With DC already being made to look stale and juvenile via Stan Lee and co.'s layered stories and flawed heroes, the Batman show only underlined how far behind the times DC were perceived to be.

Eventually, after 120 episodes and a spin-off cinema release, the ABC show lost its popularity and was cancelled. Sales of DC's Batman titles plummeted accordingly, but the silver lining was that Schwartz was able to resume his reforms. The TV show's unhyphenated Batgirl, like Alfred, continued to be part of the Batman comics universe. In all other respects, though, the ABC Batman was dispensed with, and not with a heavy heart.

A quarter-century after he (officially, at least) created the character, Bob Kane had continued influencing Batman's direction, if mainly via the work of his ghost artists. Already infuriated by Infantino becoming the first Batman artist who didn't have to sign his work as "Bob Kane", in 1968 Kane dropped out of the picture after agreeing to sell his contract to the company. Ironically, the future belonged to a darker Batman, one much closer to Kane's original vision than anything consistently seen in recent years.

That future was primarily ushered in by two people. The first was artist Neal Adams. "That show was a satire, and a good one, but it wasn't really Batman," Adams reflects. Although Adams says Infantino is "still is one of the classic Batman artists," he also opines, "Carmine ... was probably not the best artist for Batman. His work was a little bit stiff." He notes of Schwartz, "Julie was caught between a rock and a hard place: he was constrained by the licensing agreement that they had with Bob Kane and even some work that they had with Carmine Infantino. The same thing was not constraining Murray Boltinoff down the hallway."

Boltinoff was the editor of The Brave and the Bold, a bi-monthly which had latterly featured Batman and a different guest hero every issue. Although he first drew the Caped Crusader in the cheesy Batman-Superman team-up title World's Finest Comics, it was during his 1968/69 non-calendar year run on The Brave and the Bold that Adams transformed Batman. Exploiting the fact that DC bigwigs didn't seem to much care what occurred in this obscure byway of the Batman universe, he commenced to both revitalise the character and revolutionise comic layouts. Via Adams' pencil, Batman was more menacing than ever before, his ears jutting stiffly skywards and his cowl furling around him as if animated. "I'm not really a typical superhero artist," Adams says. "I draw quite a bit more realistically... People think that I drew longer ears but in fact I drew longer ears than Carmine Infantino, who drew very short ears. If you go back to Jerry

'When the show **became a ratings smash,** it meant that it became by default the only version of Batman that the majority of the populace knew'

Robinson and Bob Kane, the ears were actually quite long. I like the longer ears. It's an affectation that doesn't make any sense because somebody can grab him by the ears. The cape is like another character. I think of Batman as a guy who has come to terms with his cape and that it's like another person or a pet or a thing that's with him all the time and it's so fucking cool."

As for his outlandish panel-shapes, Adams offers, "I'm as much a designer as I am an artist." Having been "constrained" by the rigid three or four frames of his work on the syndicated Ben Casey daily newspaper strip, he says, "Now I could do this freewheeling page. I thought, 'Why don't I just go crazy? Why don't I design the page rather than the panels?' ... I went to Murray Boltinoff and said I would ask that I could change panel designs and move panels from one page to another and, if you don't mind, I'll set everything at night rather than in the daytime."

A minor Batman title The Brave and the Bold might have been, but Adams' exquisitely noir take on the character was not going unnoticed. Walking down a DC corridor one day, Adams found himself confronted by Schwartz, who demanded, "Adams, why am I getting all these letters saying that the only Batman at DC Comics is in Brave and Bold?" Adams: "I said, 'Julie, it's not just me that knows what Batman should be – it's every kid in the world. The only people that don't seem to know what Batman should be are people here at DC Comics.' And Julie said, 'You're drawing Batman for me.'"

Schwartz had already paved the way for change on the main Batman titles by swapping the Batcave and Wayne Manor for a Gotham City penthouse. Sending Dick Grayson off to college enabled the inconveniently non-gloomy Robin to be hived off to back-up strips. The real key to transformation, though, was assigning the appropriate writer. On The Brave and the Bold, Adams had drawn the scripts of Bob Haney. He was a respectable enough scribe, as was primary Batman scripter Frank Robbins, but said men's madcap approaches hardly put them on the same page as Adams about 'The Batman' (as he was now increasingly known). On Detective Comics, and subsequently Batman, Adams was teamed with Denny O'Neil. Though the latter was a Lovecraft and Poe fan who gravitated to gothic and eerie scenarios, he infused them with a thoughtfulness and grit that was the legacy of his journalism background.

The new pairing's first collaboration was in Detective Comics #395, cover-dated January 1970 but on sale several months previously. O'Neil was soon hailed as the writer who was returning Batman to his dark roots. "Everybody does their own version of Batman and none of them are wrong," O'Neil says. "I find it hard to read the Batman of the Fifties, but that was right for the times. There is no wrong way to do this stuff. There is the way that works or the way that doesn't work." "We certainly viewed him from a slightly more adult point of view," says Adams. "Denny wasn't interested really in writing superheroes – he was interested in writing, period. Here was an opportunity to write a semi-serious comic book."

For many, the dark and brooding Batman that closed out the Sixties reached its logical conclusion in the Eighties via the quasi-disturbed vision of the character proffered (as both writer and artist) by Frank Miller. Both Adams and O'Neil disagree with this viewpoint. "I like Frank, I like the work, but I think that other people had seen that Batman is not campy," says O'Neil. "At the core, it's a sad story and I don't think Frank or I are alone in that realisation."

Author: Sean Egan

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THE STATE OF INDEPENDENTS

The UK's independent and small press comics scene has never been more exciting. We bring you a look at some of the best!

"A nurturing ground for some of small press's most exciting talent"

Alex Thomas takes a look at the books of Avery Hill Publishing

In this first of a new series we profile exciting indie and small publishers and recommend their best books. We start with one of small press's biggest names, Avery Hill Publishing.

Started in 2011 by Dave White and Ricky Miller, Avery Hill has created a niche for itself as one of the UK's most innovative publishers and a nurturing ground for some of the small press scene's most exciting talent. From a humble beginning making arts and humour zines, or releasing work from small press veterans like Mike Medaglia, Avery Hill have developed a diverse and exciting line up of creators and titles. The roster now includes everything from established names to exciting newcomers, in a real mix of styles.

Metroland

This four part series from co-founder Ricky Miller follows indie band Electric dreams and their enigmatic front man Ricky Stardust. It is like a hipster Dr Who, mixing the trials and tribulations of a painfully cool indie band with surreal time travel episodes. It has been one of Avery Hill's staples for years and is an ideal start point for those looking for the ultimate super cool small press series.

You can pick up these books and more at averyhillpublishing.bigcartel.com

The Rabbit - Rachael Smith

This tale of two teenage runaways and their increasingly problematic bunny travelling companion helped establish Rachael Smith's name on the UK small press scene. The follow up to her quirky debut House Party, this mix of surreal fairytale and heartfelt coming of age story, would lay the groundwork for future work like Wired Up Wrong.

I Love This Part - Tillie Walden

Perhaps the most exciting talent to come from through Avery Hill's doors is Tillie Walden. She would go on to win Eisner Awards for On A Sunbeam and Spinning, but it was this, her second book, which really singled her out as a creator of rare talent. A subtle and affecting look at teenage sexuality Tillie represents her characters as giant figures among cityscapes, giving the book a truly unique visual style, that juxtaposes with the small and intimate tale she is telling.

Follow Me In

For her first full length graphic novel, Kat Chapman's expanded her thoughtful travelogue series Katzine into an epic volume that followed her journey around Mexico. In amongst the sumptuous maps and handy hints on backpacking around South America, Chapman entwines a heart breaking story of the breakdown of the relationship with her travel companion boyfriend. This gives the story a bitter sweet depth to it that makes it into more than just another small press travelogue and contrasts poignantly with the beautiful scenery.

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Hicotea: A Nightlights Story

Publisher: Nobrow Press
Writer: Lorena Alvarez
Artist: Lorena Alvarez
Price: £14.99 from Nobrow.net

Hicotea is the latest, astoundingly beautiful book from Lorena Alvarez's Nightlights series. Our heroine Sandy, heads off on a field trip with her class mates, but when they fall out and she goes off on her own, she encounters a strange world inside a turtle's shell.

With shades of Alice in Wonderland and Spirited Away, Hicotea is another sublime modern fairytale from Nobrow. When she enters the turtle's shell Sandy encounters the titular Hicotea, a fastidious turtle museum keeper who, once he has cleaned up the mess Sandy makes from kicking his house around, shows her a painting of a world called the wetlands which he has left blank. Hicotea asks Sandy to enter the mysterious realm and in there she finds yet another world that is struggling to survive with out Hicotea's involvement.

With it's dream-like world building, populated with strange and wonderful characters along with a wistful female lead with huge doe-like eyes, it is difficult not describe Hicotea as Studio Ghibli-esque. But it also has that surreal inventiveness of the work of Shaun Tan, especially with it's lush mix of colours that range from the murky greens of the field trip, to the vibrant pastels of the wetlands and ultimately to a much darker place as well involving the bird like villain at the end.

As with Nightlights Alvarez's artwork is just out of this world! From Hicotea's intricate museum home, to the breath taking world of the wetlands, her work feels even more confident in this latest volume.

"A dream-like world, populated with strange, wonderful characters and a wistful female lead"

Although the action begins with relatively tight panels, it soon breaks out to use more double page spreads to tell the story. Many of these have no panels and sees the action leap around different parts of the page seamlessly to create a really enthralling style of page. Perhaps the best of the bunch is a spread with Sandy exploring the wetlands with Den the frog which is just incredible.

Although the story feels a little light on substance and is resolved a bit too quickly for our liking, this lightness does not stop it from being a truly compelling read. With sub-plots which touch on environmentalism, as well as childhood friendship, and the blurred lines between imagination and reality, (just like Alice in Wonderland), there is depth there if you want to look for it. Alternatively it is also just a beautiful story about a young girl exploring a wonderful strange world.

Dungeon Fun

Publisher: BHP Comics
Writer: Colin Bell
Artist: Neil Slorance
Price: £14.99 from BHP Comics

This story about a girl and her sword begins with both landing in a huge muddy pile having being cast aside into the moat of a castle and ending up in a place called Deepmoat.

The girl in question is Fun Mudlifter, a spirited young lass who, several years after her arrival in the muddy world of Deepmoat, sees a large sword land into her home. So she sets off to do something about it and confront the queen. But in order to do this, she has to make her way through the dungeon and find out what lies beyond.

Along the way she encounters ghostly knights with considerable clout, arachnid dungeon masters, lava monsters, creepy sheriffs and a ninja assassin with a secret to tell. And all of this is told with the lightning pace and wit of one of the most enjoyable and laugh out loud indie comics going.

Instead of making Dungeon Fun into a po-faced and serious fantasy adventure, Bell and Slorance have opted for something that feels like an Adult Swim adaptation of a Terry Pratchett novel. It mixes familiar fantasy clichés (the adventurer on a quest and her fantastic sidekick) with lightning fast humour that ranges from smart to silly to surreal.

Visually, Dungeon Fun feels like it is relatively simple but it's anything but. Looking back at the early pages you can see a roughness and informality to Slorance's work, however as it develops you can see both he and Bell grow in confidence as they find their voice.

The tight panel designs cram pages full of gags and sight jokes that make it feel more like a newspaper strip than a long-winded fantasy epic and if one joke doesn't land there will be another one a couple of panels later. Oh, and the monster designs are second to none!

It's not often that a book can keep you smiling from the first page to the last, but Dungeon Fun manages just that. A great addition to the BHP line up!

Cannabis:
An American History

Publisher: SelfMadeHero
Writer: Box Brown
Price: £14.99 from SelfMadeHero

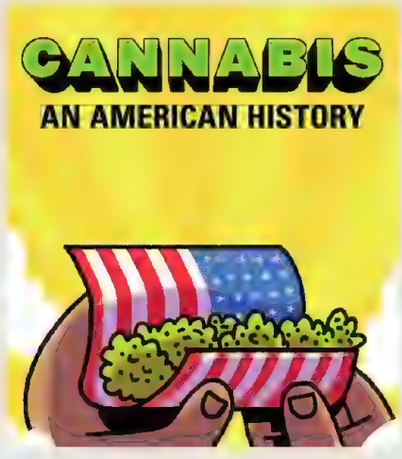
Acclaimed cartoonist's Box Brown's latest offering looks at the history of the drug's use in the US, as well as around the world.

But rather than be a glorification of cannabis, it is more of a cultural history, looking at it's use as a basis for religious worship in India, trading in the New World and as a political weapon in modern America.

Box's meticulous and highly articulate approach, makes for a fascinating read. While written with a pro-Cannabis bias, the tone of the book is very straight, relying on facts and statements to get his point across, rather than polemical rants or attempts at stoner chic.

As with Box's previous books, Andre the Giant or Tetris, Cannabis balances a detailed narrative with immaculately conceived drawings. The characterisation is simplistic, but highly stylised and very effective.

While the subject matter may prove divisive, depending on your point of view, this is much more than a piece of pro-pot propaganda. It is a fascinating look, not only at drug culture around the world, but at the way Government has attempted to control it's use and the people who use it for their own political needs.



Bronze Age Boogie

Publisher: Ahoy Comics
Writer: Stuart Moore
Artists: Alberto Ponticelli, Giulia Brusco, Rob Steen
Price: £2.49 from ComiXology

This new book from Ahoy Comics is first and foremost a love letter to the 1970s!

The story begins in 1975, with the world on the brink of disaster, as the head of a secret organisation (who just happens to be an ape) sets a plan in motion to fend off an unseen invasion. We're then flung back 3,949 years to 1975 BC where a young warrior, and her people are in the midst of battle with undead legions. There's immediately something different though, and it's not just her use of modern grammar.

The pacing of the book Is heavily influenced by its action beats, but by no means scrimps on deeper story content. When there is a pause for some exposition, it is delivered with a style and humour in keeping with the book's overall tone.

While those who crave gritty realism and relatable stakes may need to look elsewhere, the deliberate tongue in cheek tone the story carries promotes the suspension of disbelief, and there's clearly more surprises to be uncovered as the series continues.

Visually, the art team have produced a stunning looking book with the character design in particular very strong. With characters from differing time periods, suitably contrasting, while never feeling out of place. Larger images and battles (in both 1975s) never back away from either crowd or background detail, giving rise to some especially spectacular action panels.

Boy Abducted by Aliens Returns

Publisher: Accent UK
Writer: Dave West
Artist: Gustavo Vargas
Price: TBC

Part of Accent UK's Blessed/Cursed series, that also includes Whatever Happened to The Worlds Fastest Man, writer Dave West teams up with Trujillo artist Gustavo Vargas for a story which sees a young boy disappear in mysterious circumstances. But was he really abducted by extra terrestrials, or is something else going on?

Peter Thompson is your average high school kid – struggling to find himself, bullied by the cool kids and lusting after an unobtainable girl – but one day he finds out he has extraordinary powers. When he accidentally uses his brother's toothbrush he physically transforms into his sibling. However, unlike most comic books where this would then lead onto a series of body swap antics and misadventures, Dave West takes the journey on a darker almost horrific trajectory, which we won't spoil here. But suffice to say it is not what you might expect from the title. Which is both a plus and a negative.

The artwork is provided by Trujilo's Gustavo Vargas and it's great to see his work on such a different world. It has a really classic, almost 70s 2000 AD feel to it, with strong line work and great composition. It does have a slightly chaotic feel to it in places, but as with Trujillo that is part of the charm of.

Despite some misgivings, this is a poignant and thought provoking read and a really interesting title from Accent UK that will definitely make you think.

The Traveller

Publisher: TPub Comics
Writer: Neil Gibson
Artist: Tasos Anastasiades
Price: TBC from TPub Comics

Following quickly in the footsteps of last issue's The Theory, comes this steam punk time travel tale with a trademark TPub sting in the tale.

The story begins in 19th century Georgia where shepherd Ioseb is contemplating his life after his sheep become ravaged by disease. He is stopped when a mysterious iron clad character appears from nowhere. Ioseb shoots him, and takes his armour to keep warm, only to be catapulted through a vortex into another time and place.

While The Traveller starts off as Iron Man meets Quantum Leap, it soon involves into a much more complex and involved morality puzzle. Gibson takes a sideways look at a traditional moral conundrum, as well as the motivation of leaders and rebels which is very apt in our current 'fake news'/online propaganda world.

The Traveller ends with a classic TPub twist in the tale at the end that really takes you by surprise and turns what could have been a fairly gloomy steam punk tale into a trademark dark and twisted Neil Gibson tale.

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"It's amazing when people see your work, understand it, and want to see more"

We meet Laydeez Do Comics Award winner **Niki Bañados**

Now in it's second year, The Laydeez Do Comics Award is given to the best in-progress graphic novel produced by a female or female identifying creator. This year's award was won by Niki Bañados for her fascinating book Shivers in London. Keen to find out more about Niki's work and the significance of this award win, we caught up with her for a chat.

Congratulations on winning the Laydeez Do Comics Award, what does winning an award like this mean to you? And what inspired you to enter in the first place?
Niki Bañados: Winning something like this gives me a lot of confidence that what I'm making has some sort of appeal, and is relate-able, and basically up to scratch. Creating a comic often involves a lot of time feeling a bit isolated in your own head so it's amazing when people see it, understand it, and want to see more.

Can you tell us a bit about Shivers in London? What the concept is and what the inspirations were?
NB: This chapter is about moving from Sydney to London, about the physical act of travel and how it feels to be contained in mid air and to arrive within this old, organic, thriving mega-city. The rest of the work details snapshots of experiences here and may delve into some messy relationships… Most of it could be described as autobiographical, but very much making use of my artistic license to change the story.

The first part of NIki's work chronicles her move from Sydney to London

What is it about the medium of graphic novels that made you want to tell your story this way?
NB: Being able to use both images and words is really helpful because I can harness the things that they say and don't say to emphasise how things felt. The words are quite personal, like journalled thoughts, but the images are fantastical, to help me explore the experiences more metaphorically.

What other graphic novel creators inspire you?
NB: I love the fluid line-work in books like Stitches by David Small and in Rembrandt by Typex. Books like this really push me to be better at the technical aspects of art: to put the time in to understanding the human figure and how to draw it expressively.

A lot of autobiographical and non-fiction creators are using the medium to tell difficult stories. That's inspiring because it takes a lot out of anyone to create in such a time consuming medium, let alone for that creation to force you to process painful or potentially irresolvable experiences.

Is Shivers in London complete? If so, how and where can people read it?
NB: I'm still working on it – I think I can do about a chapter or more a month, but that's if I'm not working on anything else at the time! I don't have a 'how' yet, but I always intended to publish it online as a webtoon (infinite scroll down rather than page by page) so even if publishers aren't interested it will still be out there somewhere.

You can find more about Niki's work at nikibanados.com/art and find out more about Laydeez Do Comics Prize at laydeezdocomics.wordpress.com

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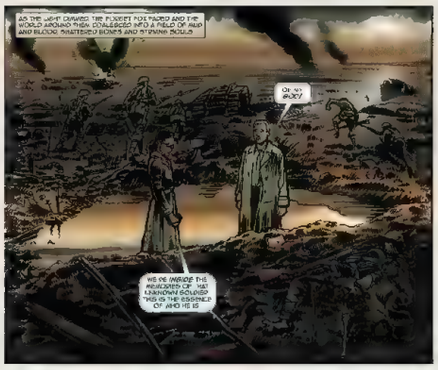
"It's all about trying to capture the spirit of Warrior rather than a slavish re-invention."

Steve Tanner on the inspirations for new anthology **Brawler**

Warrior, the 80s anthology which brought us V For Vendetta and Miracleman has inspired a generation of UK creators. None more so than TimeBomb Comics' Steve Tanner. With his new anthology Brawler he is looking to recapture the energy and originality of Warrior. With the first issue debuting at the Portsmouth Comic Convention, we caught up with Steve to find more about Brawler!

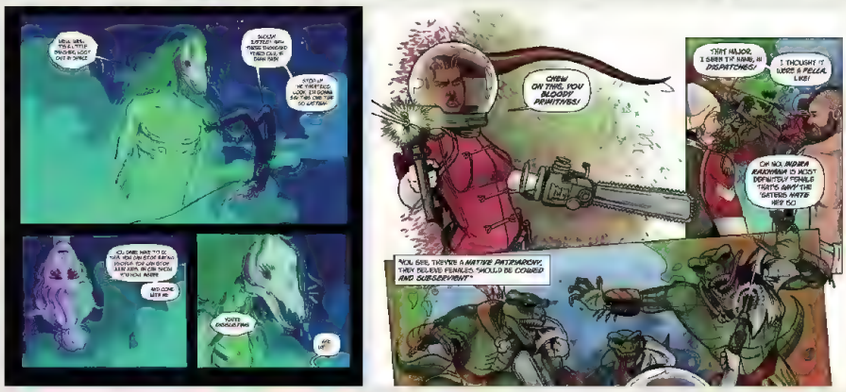
Your new anthology is inspired by Warrior, why do you think the world needs a new comic like that?
Steve Tanner: The idea was Jason Cobley's. Last October he posted on social media ruminating on how much he missed Warrior and that it was a shame there wasn't anything like it around these days – I messaged him straight away saying "You're right. Let's do it." So we did. There was a bit more back and forth from that point of course, both of us had similar but not exacting ideas so there was some alignment needed, but it was all about trying to capture that spirit of Warrior rather than any slavish re-invention.

What was it about Warrior that people look back on so fondly?
ST: Warrior was a character driven anthology which was something very familiar to readers of British weekly comics, but also creator owned, which wasn't. It was hugely influential, and brought some key comic creators to the attention of a wider audience.


AS THE LIGHT DAWNED THE FLICKERS AND THE WORLD AROUND THEM COALESCED INTO A FIELD OF MUD AND BLOOD, SHATTERED BONES AND STRAWN SOULS
OH, MY GOD!
WE'RE INSIDE THE MEMORIES OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER! THIS IS THE ESSENCE OF WHO HE IS!

The first issue includes some established characters like Amnesia Agents and Frankenstein Texas along with new work.

YOU THINK THIS COULD BE HIM?
MY CREATOR?
NO. HE WOULD CUT, NOT TEAR.
I KNOW HOW HE THINKS.
THIS IS NOT HIM.
PLEASE, LET ME CLEAN YOUR WOUNDS. THEY WILL BECOME INFECTED.
I... JUST LEAVE ME ALONE. I DON'T NEED NONE OF YOUR FUSS.
WE!. LET HIM BE.


CHEW ON THIS, YOU BLOODY PRIMITIVES!
THAT MAJOR, I GUESS I'LL HAVE TO RETHINK MY DISPATCHES!
I THOUGHT IT WERE A FELLA, LIKE!
OH NO, INDIRA RAKHANA IS MOST DEFINITELY FEMALE. THAT'S WHY THE SATIRES WERE HER SO

Dan Whitehead and David Hitchcock's Frankenstein Texas joins Steve's Major Rakhana

It didn't last long, but while it did it burned brightly. Our Brawler cover design really pays homage to Warrior I think, but designer James Gray has very cleverly managed to come up with a layout that seems to trigger the memories of those that are familiar with Warrior without confusing those unaware of a title that hasn't been published for almost forty years.

There's s a fantastic mix of creators, how did you select your line up?

ST: Jason had a couple of names, I suggested a couple more, and then we asked them to pitch and considered each one. Tonally, we wanted great genre stories so we targeted writers we knew could deliver that, and artists who really understood sequential storytelling. A key part of the final selection process was to be sure that each of the ideas pitched had a strong central character concept – there's no "lead" strip in Brawler. All of the stories could be, and all feature characters that can stand perfectly well on their own, in their own titles.

Brawler features familiar stories, such as Frankenstein Texas and Amnesia Agents, why include them?

ST: As with the original Warrior we feature new stories about characters that have appeared elsewhere side-by-side with brand new creations. But it was also being aware that there was existing fanbase for the characters and their creators, and the tone and style of those concepts fitted Brawler perfectly. Frankenstein, Texas was one of my favourite comics of 2018 – so having a new Frankenstein story appear ticks a massive box for me. Also, it's the only story that we knew would be kept in black and white because, well, David Hitchcock!

This feels like quite a departure from your work on Flintlock, do you enjoy creating comics in different genres?

ST: Well, not too much of a departure for me creatively. My story in Brawler #1, Major Rakhana, introduces a female lead, and a historically steampunk genre – so I don't think I've wandered too far off the path, there!

How regularly is this going to be released?

ST: The first issue was always a test, really, to see if there's an audience for Brawler. I've a meeting scheduled with Jason Cobley at Portsmouth Comic Con and there's only one item on the agenda: Brawler #2! We're not going to be monthly, and even quarterly might be a stretch – but I've already shuffled my schedule around to allow for future Brawler releases.

You can pick up Brawler #1 along with Steve's other titles at timebombcomics.com/shop

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Stand In Your Power

Publisher: Rachael Smith
Writer: Rachael Smith
Price: £10 from www.etsy.com/uk/shop/FlimsyKitten

The follow up to the critically acclaimed Wired Up Wrong, this latest series of diary comics continues Rachael's painfully honest look at her own mental health and the way she copes with life's ups and downs.

While Wired Up Wrong mixed those personal moments with humourous looks at her own mental health, Stand In Your Power has evolved into a much more revealing account of her day to day life. The book begins with the break up of her relationship with a long term boyfriend and follows the way she copes with this situation and begins to rebuild her life. Along the way she must also manage the manifestations of her mental anguish, which she represents as two black dogs.

While it is a shame to see some of the more quirky elements of Wired Up Wrong disappear (such as the wheel of emotions), instead we get a brutally honest and though provoking look at Rachael's world. Along with strips that see her move into a new flat, find love and rekindle friendships, Rachael also explores the issue of self harm, in a dedicated section which accounts her own experiences. You can't help but be affected by the openness of these scenes as it feels like a close friend is opening their heart to you in the most personal way possible. And this honesty is what makes the book so readable and relate-able.

Throughout the book Rachael is so open that it makes Stand In your Power more than 'just another mental health book'. It has now become a look at 21st century life and love, told through the pen of one of comics most open and honest story-tellers.

Petrichor

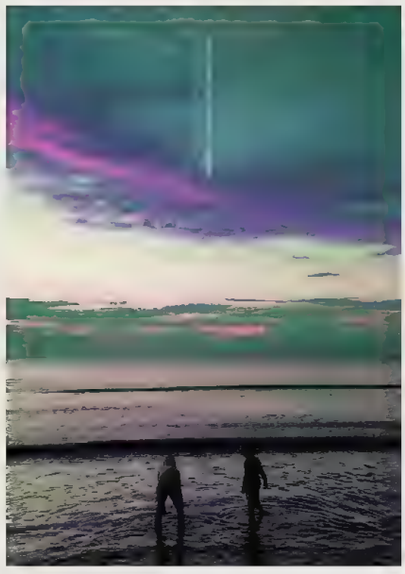
Publisher: Good Comics
Writer/Artist: Gareth A Hopkins
Price: £12.00 from www.goodcomics.co.uk/bookstore

We often talk about a comic pushing boundaries and being unlike anything else. However when it comes to Petrichor, there really is nothing else out there quite like this.

Hopkins' mix of abstract images are part Rorschach test and part crazy doodles that looks like a spider on drugs is attacking every page. His pages feel almost built, rather than drawn, and in doing this he creates strange and mesmerising images that he repeats, paints over, writes on, and cuts up to place into panels or redraws and re-imagines in order to make his own take on a comic.

For those not put off by the concept of an abstract comic, much of which is in black and white, then you are in for a very thoughtful and considered read. Alongside the unique imagery, each page is layered with heartfelt and poignant slices of dialogue about childhood, love, memory and loss.

It would be easy to pick apart Petrichor for being all style and no substance, but that is to miss the point. Petrichor has an originality to it that makes it very readable and is a genuinely unique experience.



SMALL PRESS SPOTLIGHT

Our pick of some of the best new self-published comics

We're used to Viking epics being all about big horns and bushy beards, so it is nice to read something a little more sedate and thoughtful in **The Wedding of Njord and Skadi,** the new title from Jon Mason and Simon Russell. Based on an ancient Norse myth it sees giantess Skadi reluctantly wedded to Njord, lord of the Seaways, in order to stop her from attacking Asgard. However this odd couple struggle to find common ground and it ends up almost the inverse of a classic love story. While the story is told in poetic clips of narration, it is the artwork which is truly something else. Russell's painted style mixes media and has a flowing, brush-stroke heavy approach which makes the book feel more like an ancient painting brought to life, rather than a comic. Although perhaps not the most accessible of stories, it has a unique charm and originality to it which makes well worth a look. (Although not if you are expecting something like Marvel's Thor!)

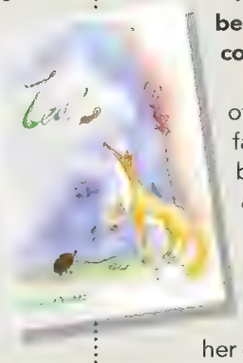
Pick up The Marriage of Njord and Skadi for £5 from boinggraphics.co.uk/shop

Ken Reynolds' **Sliced Quarterly Volume 3** has become a firm fixture of the small press scene in recent years, and so it is with regret that we look at this third and final volume. Originally started as a digital only release, it has developed into 3 print volumes containing some of the most interesting and original small press comics around - as well as a fantastic creator community. Ken's intention with Sliced was to create an environment where creators could be free to experiment and as such the variety of work on show means in every issue, there is something much more interesting than your average small press anthology. It means creators can mix up their styles and try new and different ideas, but also it that stories from differing genres and art styles can sit side by side. This means abstract creators like Stuart McCune or Gareth Hopkins cam feature their work alongside more conventional stories like Matt MacFarland's ode to Robert Crumb. The series' open minded approach is perhaps best summed up by one of Ken's own stories, which is told entirely using speech bubbles and sound effects. Not only does it show off Ken's excellent lettering skills, but is also a reminder of how important lettering it to telling a story.

Individual issues of Sliced Quarterly can be downloaded for free from www.slicequarterly.co.uk

Husband and wife team Gav and Emily Mitchell bring us **Pup and Grumpicorn** a collection of stories featuring a hyperactive, doughnut loving dog and a moody unicorn in search of 'noble foods'. The stories are set in a variety of locations from classic fairytale to the wild west and even outer space, but really it is just a vehicle for Gav and Emily to write some silly stories and tell some silly jokes - which is no bad thing! Their unique brand of goofy humour is brought to life by Gav's superb artwork. It's much lighter in tone than his work on Trolltooth Wars, but is a lot of fun all the same. With the kind of high energy silliness and attention to detail that we love in the Etherington Brothers' work (including a Von Doogan style maze at the back), this is a little sample into what a fantastic comic a fully fledged Pup and Grumpicorn adventure could be, and we really hope to see more!

Pup and Grumpicorn will be available from www.etsy.com/shop/wearehappyclam



The latest member of the Fairspark Book family, Nicola Bates' new book **Leaf** is a delicate and dream like story about a fox and a leaf. Following up her debut, Anxiety Me, this is a much lighter read than her debut but still utilises her ethereal watercolour style to create a flowing and lyrical story. A fox follows a leaf which falls from a tree and sees him interact with a number of other woodland animals. Told without any dialogue, it is perhaps a little lightweight in terms of content, but as a book to encourage youngsters to get into comics, it is an interesting hybrid of children's story book and comic. **Pick up Leaf from fairsparkbooks.co.uk**

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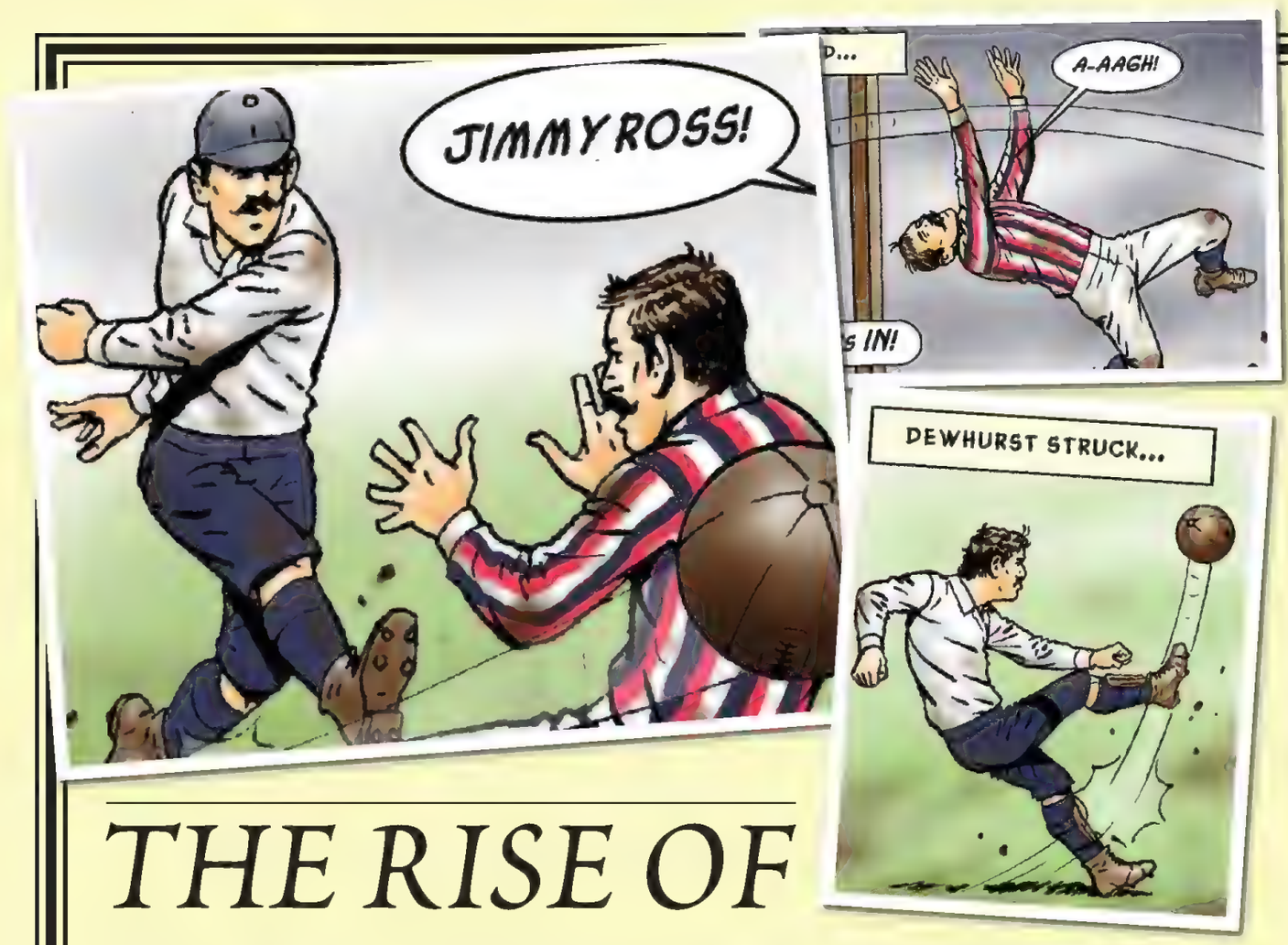

THE RISE OF THE INVINCIBLES

A lifelong supporter of Preston North End as well a reader of comics, Michael Barrett has combined his two passions in his debut graphic novel, The Rise of the Invincibles. Chronicling the amazing exploits of the Lancashire club's unbeaten First Division title and FA Cup winning side of 1888 to 1889, Barrett made an impressive signing of his own, recruiting legendary Roy of the Rovers artist David Sque to illustrate the 152-page book.

"I was born in Deepdale just minutes from North End's ground, so the club has always been a big part of my life," recalls Barrett. "And an early age, like most kids, The Beano was my introduction to the world of comics, then in later years I graduated to Roy of the Rovers. I had no idea back then that one day I'd be producing my own comic book with the very artist whose work I followed week in and week out! All those hours reading stories such as Roy of the Rovers, Durrell's Palace and The Hard Man offered fantastic schooling on displaying football action on the page from pacing a story to scripting and so on. I was learning all the time – unbeknownst to me!"

Inspired by a radio interview he heard one day about a graphic novel that was based on a historical event, Barrett realised that the format would perfectly suit the story of The Invincibles. Despite having only having written a few short stories and articles at that point, he didn't let his inexperience put him off. Describing it as "a labour of love," he had the Spain-based Sque's contact details after a friend had interviewed the veteran artist, who along with Roy of the Rovers also drew Tiger favourite Martin's Favourite Mini and The Daily Mirror's long-running Scorer strip.

"I truthfully doubted he'd be interested as this was my first book and he's a leader in his field," admits Barrett. "However, I took a bit of courage, sent him an email and to my surprise, he replied straight away, saying he'd love to be involved."

Also an accomplished land and seascape artist, Sque's innate ability to capture likenesses proved crucial. "The finished illustrations are remarkable considering some of the grainy 2D photos David had to work from," says Barrett. "Obviously paramount was his ability to draw realistic football action, and being factual, I didn't want to lend the book any extremes of comic art, so it had to

be real. David is an expert at this, as he honed his craft in the era of football comic art greats like Joe Colquhoun and Yvonne Hutton, and is a master of the art. I also had the advantage of looking back through his catalogue of work and on occasion took from it as references for particularly panels, such as 'I'd like something similar to the scene attached where (Roy's teammate) Blackie Gray crosses the ball to his right.' In short, David's work inspired by ideas for the book, and working with him on it was a privilege."

With Preston North End now languishing in the Championship, Barrett has long been fascinated the story of the Old Invincibles, who were the only team to not lose a game in the English top flight or premiere cup competition until Arsenal also achieved a similarly impressive feat over a century later in 2002/ 2003.

"I remember seeing a mural of them at the ground when I was a child and being intrigued by this team who couldn't be beaten and the very name 'Invincibles' bestowed an almost mythical, comic book status, so I suppose the seeds were sewn then," reasons Barrett. "And when doing my research, I discovered that their tale was even more incredible than I first assumed, as North End's Invincibles were so much more than just the unbeaten winners of the first ever Football League and FA Cup double, they were also innovators who – along with a handful of other clubs – helped change the way the game was played and run. They took risks, suffered huge disappointments and overcome bans and misfortune to finally emerge triumphant as the greatest team of their age! Their story is more than just Roy of the Rovers stuff, it's an epic tale of perseverance and I felt a graphic novel was the perfect vehicle in which to tell it."

Self-publishing The Rise of the Invincibles last year, the book has been warmly embraced not just by supporters of Preston North End but also a wide cross section of football and comics fans of all ages. "I just wanted to tell the story in an entertaining way and provide a snapshot of Victorian life," says Barrett. "PNE fans have told me that it's a great way to pass on the history of their club to family members young and old, but for others there is more to the book than just PNE history. It covers the birth of football, the foundation of the Football Association and the FA Cup, the battle to turn the game professional, and formation of the Football League. There's plenty in there for footy fans in general and I've received messages from supporters of different clubs who bought the book, having initially been hooked by the Roy of the Rovers style."

Along with a pilot for a possible documentary about The Rise of the Invincibles, Barrett is currently developing several potential new comic books, which you might even be able to help him out with. "I've got another four comics in mind, two football related, and have just started researching the first," he reveals. "It has been a steep learning curve for me these past few years, and I feel like I've learned a lot and cannot wait to try out some new ideas. The new project is again a football period story, which is again factual, although not about PNE. As it happens I'm looking for an artist, so if you're a comic artist with a knowledge and love of football, please give me a shout!"

Preston North End – The Rise of Invincibles is available via **www.invinciblebooks.co.uk**

THE SECOND HALF WAS MUCH MORE EVEN...
THWACK!
IN 1860'S PRESTON, CRICKET WAS THE MOST POPULAR SPORT IN TOWN AND COUNTLESS TEAMS EMERGED FROM ITS MILLS, SOCIAL CLUBS AND RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS.

Author: Stephen Jewell | **Twitter:** @stephenjewell | **Stephen writes for SFX, Total Film & the Megazine**

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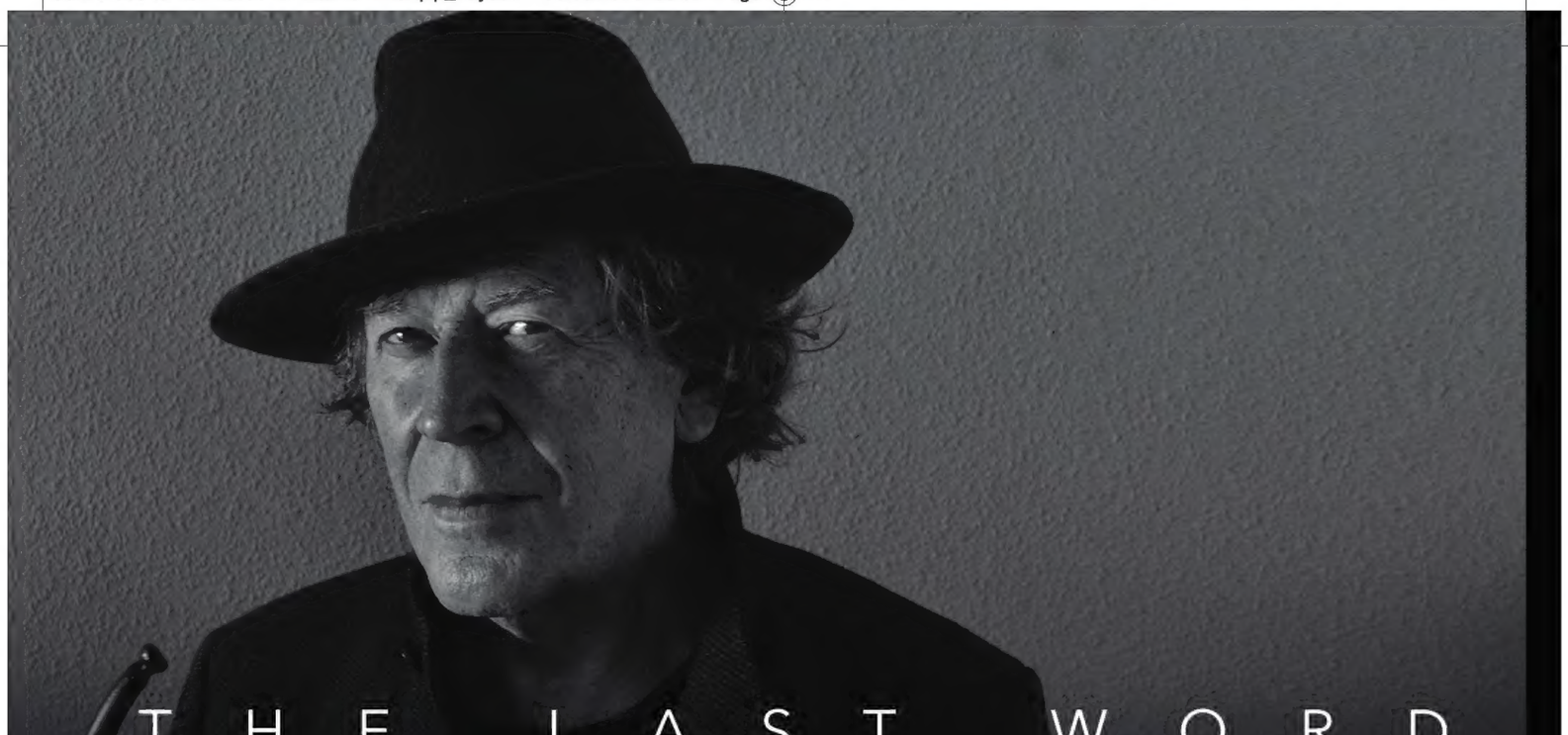

THE LAST WORD

with Pat Mills

SPACE WARP IS COMING

If you've ever wondered what it was like to create a comic like 2000AD, now is your chance to find out. To experience the highs, the lows, the creative jamming with artists, the excitement of breakthroughs and the disappointments when things go wrong. Then the satisfaction of solving those problems, getting the art right, the stories right, the thrill of seeing amazing new artwork, and the knowledge that we are facilitating great new talent who, otherwise, might be stuck in some boring job. And finally, the thrill of viewing the finished awesome comic.

So pull up a ringside seat, because that's what I'm intending to do with SPACE WARP.

Space Warp will be a one-shot, anthology, popular culture SF comic featuring new, or lesser-known (not established) artists.

Drawn to professional standard, it will be for the equivalent of 2000AD's original core readership: a comic that was enjoyed by all age groups.

I want Space Warp to be a similar age-buster. Just like Sherlock Holmes, Doctor Who, Harry Potter and James Bond. Such great fiction can be enjoyed by anyone, any age.

It will be available as print on demand and digital, and it will be creator-owned by the artists and the writer.

It's written and drawn on spec, but it will be monetised. It won't be crowd-funded.

Space Warp is in the tradition of classic SF comics, like 2000AD in its early years, but updated for 2019. It's not satire or homage to the past, it's new stories with something new to say. It'll be black and white. No

colour. And the artists must be of the same high standard as the original 2000AD. Not cartoon style and not fanzine art

It's inspired by Book Three of my Read Em And Weep thriller series (currently being written). If all goes well, Space Warp could be out later this year.

Theme-wise, Space Warp is a unifying and terrifying event that links the stories as it warps time, space, realities and people.

Introduced by alien robot editor Schlock, the comic is male-orientated, like 2000AD, but with modern female characters (no Marvel comics anatomy), modern sensibilities and varied ethnicity.

And stories like Jurassic Man (see above) can definitely be enjoyed by all genders.

The comic has two broad objectives:

First, to encourage new talent and prove the viability of a proper copyright deal based on the French comics industry standard: the best in the world.

As opposed to the archaic British 'all rights' model, which has nearly destroyed British adventure comics and continues to harm it by not attracting or retaining top talent, or encouraging creators to give of their very best.

Second, to show that it's possible to recapture comics' original core younger audience. The audience that the industry willfully deserted and that defeatists don't believe can be catered for anymore (and don't really like or understand, anyway, preferring supposedly superior 'adult' comics).

SPACE WARP One will be six stories of approximately six pages each story. Plus a Future Schlock story, a full-colour cover, and editorial pages. It will be British comic size, not American.

Below is a list of the current line-up with a brief summary of what they are about. They will all be available for artists to try out for, apart from Jurassic Man and two of the Future Schlocks. New artist Simon Hodgkiss-Rogers has already made an excellent start on Jurassic Man. French artist Gregory Markles is drawing a Future Schlock that will also appear in Gryyym magazine, and a top art college wants their students to draw another Future Schlock. More information on this project on my Millsverse Storyteller site.

- ***SPACE WARP*** One – THE STORIES
- ***AGENT IMPOSSIBLE*** – He doesn't want to be a God. He wants the Warp powers for everyone. So they tried to kill him. But, covered in bullet-wounds, he just keeps on coming.
- ***HELLBREAKER*** – The Dead escape from Hell and go to war with the Living. They've already suffered so much: 'You can't do anything to us anymore'.
- ***FUTANTS*** – Future delinquent mutants shoplift in time and space and more as their ruthless bosses hunt them down.
- ***SLAYER*** – A Human Galactic Empire is challenged by one Alien: Schlock.
- ***SF1*** – Strike Force One. Future soldiers fighting in the Eternal War.
- ***FUTURE SCHLOCKS*** – The robot editor shares his anti-human stories for his and your entertainment.
- ***JURASSIC MAN*** – One man against a million dinosaurs.
- ***XECUTIONERS*** – 62 moons. 62 realities. One police force.

I believe Space Warp will have considerable general readership, collector appeal and ongoing interest.

Although I'm not set up to produce the stories on a week in, week out basis, like 2000AD.

However, I can produce Space Warp One as a print on demand and digital anthology.

Then – after a suitable interval of say, six months, I could envisage a second one-shot print on demand comic: Space Warp Two.

We could continue with the same stories or combine them with a second different wave of stories that didn't make the first selection.

It will depend on audience feedback, artists' commitments and the talent that emerges.

And after that, who knows?

Author: Pat Mills | **Twitter:** @PatMillsComics | **Website:** millsverse.com
Tweet us your thoughts @comicsflixukus #comicscene #tlw

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THERE ARE 100'S OF COMIC BOOKS TO DISCOVER ON THE COMICHAUS APP.

TRY FREE FOR 14 DAYS AND #READMORECOMICBOOKS